Understanding The Orthodox Liturgy

A Guide for Participating in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom

By

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"Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

-- *Matthew 6:20-21*

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"We have seen the true Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true Faith, worshiping the undivided Trinity: for He has saved us."
The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

We are pleased to endorse this excellent book and video, UNDERSTANDING THE ORTHODOX LITURGY by the Very Reverend Michel Najim and T.L. Frazier. We authorize its use in all the churches of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, and recommend it to all English-speaking Orthodox Christians everywhere. It will be especially useful to all those who have an interest in Orthodox Christianity and the formative years of the Church.

Father Michel and T.L. Frazier have captured for us the true meaning of our liturgical prayers, chants and ritual. Every word and movement of the Holy Liturgy has a specific reality -- to lead us to the undivided Trinity and salvation in God's Kingdom. Holy Orthodoxy means "of true worship." It is because of liturgy that the Church has survived for almost 2000 years, for those who worship and understand what and who they worship, have embraced the Eternal Light of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Given at the Archdiocesan Office, on the 16th day of May, 1995 in Englewood, New Jersey

Metropolitan PHILIP
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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE MEANING OF THE LITURGY

When Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, he was given a very explicit set of instructions on how they were to worship the God who freed them. These instructions were revealed by God on Mount Sinai and are found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. From this beginning arose the complex liturgical Temple worship of ancient Israel.

In the New Testament, we find that Jesus' disciples, who were all Jewish, at first continued to worship in the Temple and afterwards gathered at a private home to celebrate the particularly Christian "breaking of bread," the Holy Eucharist.[1] Christian life at that time is described in the Book of Acts as continuing "steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers (*tais proseuchais*)."[2] Christians would "break bread" on the first day of the week, the day the Lord had risen from the dead.[3]

Christians came to see their worship as the legitimate maturation of the worship given to Moses, supplanting the cult of the Temple in Jerusalem. Inasmuch as Christ had established a better covenant between God and the fallen world, He obtained for us "a more excellent *liturgy*": "For if [Jesus] were on earth, He would not be a priest, since

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[1]Acts 2:46; 3:1.

[2]It is unclear whether "the prayers" referred to here are the prayers said when celebrating the Eucharist or the Jewish prayer said when the Christians "went up together into the Temple at the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1).

[3]Acts 20:7.

there are priests who offer gifts according to the law (i.e., the Jewish priests in Jerusalem); who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, `See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'[4] But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry (*leitourgias*, or "liturgy" in English), inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises."[5] Like the worship given to Moses, which as we read above was "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things," Christians also saw their liturgical worship as mirroring the worship of the heavenly hosts. As Saint Germanus, the eighth century Patriarch of Constantinople, would later put it, "The church is an earthly heaven in which the super-celestial God dwells and walks about."[6]

The word "liturgy" is a contraction of two Greek words, the word *lakos* meaning "common," as in "belonging to the people," and the word *ergon*, meaning "work." Thus "liturgy" refers to the work of the common people in praising God. In this work, the bishop or priest presides as an image, or *icon*, of Jesus Christ, conducting the worship along with the Faithful. In the words of Saint Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch who was martyred around A.D. 110, "Wherever the bishop appears let the congregation also be present; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic (Greek: the "whole") Church."[7] The word "liturgy" is routinely used in the New Testament,[8] and is used as well in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (made in Alexandria, Egypt in the third century B.C.).[9]

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[4]Exodus 25:40.

[5]Hebrews 8:4-6.

[6]Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, 1.

[7]Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 8:2.

[8]E.g., Luke 1:23; Acts 13:2; Philippians 2:17; Hebrews 8:2, 6; 9:21; 10:11.

[9]E.g., Exodus 28:35, 43; 29:30; 37:19; Numbers 8:22; 16:9; 18:2, 4; 2 Chronicles 31:2; etc.

The Eucharistic Liturgy is the "work of the people" *par excellence*, and is usually called the "Divine Liturgy" in the Orthodox Church. The word "eucharist" in Greek means "thanksgiving." Thus, in the Liturgy, we not only commemorate our Lord's Last Supper, we also offer our own humble gratitude in a supreme act of thanksgiving. It is not proper for the priest to conduct the Divine Liturgy alone, as there are no "private liturgies" in the Orthodox tradition. Indeed, such would be impossible because of the communal nature of the Liturgy -- the priest prays for the people and in turn the people pray for the priest, offering sacred hymns with the angels in behalf of all humanity. In the Liturgy, the Faithful are made partners with Jesus Christ, our High Priest, and with one another. It is a service of love, "a fragrant sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God"[10] in which all the people of God are invited to participate fully, eternally eating and drinking at the Holy Table of the Lord.

The Eucharist is a true communion with the Lord, the elements of bread and wine being transformed into the real Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, sanctifying the people and granting forgiveness of sins. It is a full participation in the glorified body of the Savior, a spiritual sacrifice offered in the spiritual house,[11] and a promise of an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. It is He who commands us to offer bread and wine;[12] it is He who gives us in return the Living Bread and the Chalice of eternal life.[13] The Divine Liturgy is ultimately an "eschatological" event, meaning the age to come breaks in upon this present age and into our everyday lives. And having broken into our lives in the here and now, it lifts us to a point altogether outside of time.

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[10]Philippians 4:18.

[11]1 Peter 2:5.

[12]John 6:54, 56.

[13]John 6:57.

In the Liturgy, all that Christ did and suffered are represented symbolically. Contemplating what Christ did on our behalf helps to prepare us to approach the Holy Altar. It is important to be prepared when receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, for the Father does not permit those to be sanctified who are not properly disposed to receive the divine grace. Ultimately, all of Church life is nothing but a preparation to receive the Bread of Life[14] at the heavenly banquet, participating in the eternal, divine life of God.

To obtain the effects of the divine *Mysteries*, as the Sacraments are called in the Orthodox Church, we must approach them in a state of grace. We must approach the Eucharist venerating Him who had such great compassion for us and who saved us by His own life.[15] We must entrust our very lives to Him, knowing His love for us, dedicating ourselves and one another to Him, and enkindling in our hearts the flame of love. Thus prepared, we may enter into the fire of the solemn Mysteries with confidence, trusting in the infinite goodness of the Lord. But to arrive at this point, we must banish all wandering thoughts and distractions, focusing instead on the Holy Table and the "wedding feast of the Lamb."[16] Only when our hearts are set on Christ alone can we worthily receive holy Communion.

In this way, by adding sanctification to sanctification, that is, by adding the Eucharist to prayer and meditation, we receive the fullness of Christ, and grace for grace.[17] In this act of eucharistic Communion, "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."[18] This is the sole purpose of the Divine Liturgy: to bring the people of God through the cup of

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[14]John 6:48.

[15]Romans 5:10.

[16]Revelation 19:9.

[17]John 1:16.

[18]2 Corinthians 3:18.

blessing[19] into one Communion, one Church, and to deify them. Because of this, the Orthodox Church doesn't allow those not in communion with her to partake of the Eucharist. Those who are not of the same Faith by definition cannot be made "one" in the eucharistic Communion of the One Church.

VESPERS AND OTHER PREPARATIONS FOR THE DIVINE LITURGY

The biblical reckoning of a day is from sundown to sundown, not from midnight to midnight as we think of it today. This understanding of a day can be seen in the Creation itself: "And the evening and the morning were the first day."[20] Orthodoxy has continued this ancient biblical orientation, as reflected by its evening Vesper service which is considered the first service of the new day. The Vesper service on Saturday evening focuses on Christ and His resurrection, anticipating the Sunday morning Liturgy. It prepares us for the Divine Liturgy through psalms, hymns and prayers, all of which have as their theme the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of these Vesper hymns, "O Gladsome Light," sees in the evening setting of the sun -- which looks as though it is descending into the earth -- a picture of our Lord's descent into the grave, and in the sun's rising at dawn a picture of the resurrection. This hymn has been used by the Church since the second century, and was likely inspired by the prophecy in Malachi 4:2: "But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." This verse was widely interpreted in the ancient Church as a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ.

However, preparation for the Sunday Liturgy is by no means limited to the Vesper service. After Vespers, we continue to prepare our hearts and minds with prayers of contrition and penitence. We are to follow the example of

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[19] 1 Corinthians 10:16.

[20] Genesis 1:5.

King David, who repeatedly cried out in the Psalms, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your great mercy.” What is required is reconciliation, both with God and with our neighbors. No longer living for ourselves,[21] our lives must become a ministry of reconciliation. When we implore God’s forgiveness for our sins, we must remember that He forgives us our trespasses only insofar as we forgive those who trespass against us. Thus we must cast aside all the resentments we may harbor toward those who have wronged us. We must also recognize the wrongs we have committed against others and seek their forgiveness. When we have done this, we need to guard our hearts from further evil thoughts, being especially sober and vigilant in mind and body until the hour of the Liturgy.

The best weapon against evil thoughts is continuous prayer. As the Apostle exhorts us, we need to “pray without ceasing.”[22] The “Prayer of the Heart,” also called “The Jesus Prayer,” has a long history in the Orthodox tradition as a vehicle leading to continuous prayer. It is helpful the night before the Liturgy to pass into sleep with the Jesus Prayer on our lips: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” Slowly repeating this prayer, which asks for mercy and reconciliation with God, is an excellent way to attain inner quiet.

There are also other prayers which can be said on Saturday evening in preparation for the Liturgy. We can read the prayer of “Little Compline,” which implores God to grant repose of both body and soul, preserving them from the impulses of the passions (disordered appetites). Immediately after praying the Creed, the canon of preparation for holy Communion can also be read.

Not only prayer, but fasting is necessary as well. As anyone familiar with the Bible is aware of, fasting is more than a mere dietary exercise. It is a personal struggle against the evil within us, a direct confrontation with our passions. Fasting before Communion forces us to answer the most fundamental question: Who is our Lord, the flesh or Christ? By thus challenging our passions, we learn to master them and are then able to “commend ourselves . . . and our whole life to Christ our God.” It ought to be noted that it was after He fasted in the

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[21]2 Corinthians 5:15.

[22]1 Thessalonians 5:17.

wilderness that Christ Himself rejected Satan.[23] Like prayers, psalms and spiritual reading, fasting has as its aim turning us toward God. Thus the Orthodox Church insists that its members abstain from all food and drink on Sunday morning prior to receiving the Eucharist.

It is uncertain whether fasting was required before receiving the Eucharist in the ancient Church. Originally the Eucharist was associated with a communal meal known as the "*agape* (Greek for "love") feast."[24] These meals were usually held in the afternoon and may have originally been inspired by the final Passover which our Lord celebrated. Such agape feasts were celebrated during apostolic times, and many believe that the prayers at such meals were derived from the Jewish *b'rakhah* (thanksgiving, blessing).

During the second century, the agape became separated from the Eucharist and the meal eventually became a simple charitable fund raiser for the poor. In time the agape feasts largely disappeared because of the abuses they engendered. Even during the first decades of the Church, the apostle Paul had to rebuke the Christians at Corinth because their agape feasts had become the occasion of factions, gluttony and drunkenness.[25] Canon 28 of the Council of Laodicea (364) forbade agape feasts to be celebrated in churches and, later, the Council in Trullo (692) affirmed this decision for the whole Church in canon 74. As the agape feast became more and more disassociated from the Eucharist, the discipline of fasting came to be seen as a better way of preparing for Communion. Like Anna who fasted and prayed day and night awaiting for the coming of the Lord into the Temple,[26] Christians are to fast in anticipation of meeting the Lord in the church during Communion.

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[23]Cf. Matthew 4:1-11.

[24]Cf. Jude 12.

[25]1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 33-34.

[26]Luke 2:37.

Frequent reception of the Eucharist is good and the goal toward which every Christian ought to strive. Our Lord said, “Take, eat;” and it defeats the main purpose of the Eucharist if the people don’t “take” and “eat.” Lamenting the decline in Communion which started in the fourth century, Saint John Chrysostom complained, “In vain do we stand before the altar; there is no one to partake.”[27]

It should also be emphasized that it is not necessary to receive the Mystery of Penance before each reception of the Eucharist. On the other hand, one must not receive the Eucharist in a state of serious sin. A balance needs to be achieved between being over-scrupulous and of thoughtlessly partaking of Communion. Therefore, all who frequently partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ should do so under the guidance of the parish priest or some other competent confessor.

SUNDAY MORNING PREPARATION

On Sunday morning, both the priest and the Faithful read the service of preparation for holy Communion, asking God to purify their hearts from the burden of sin so they may partake of the Eucharist without condemnation. The Midnight Office is recited just prior to Matins. Originally it was read at midnight (as the name implies), but it was later moved to its present position.

Matins, or “Orthros” in Greek, is the morning service which precedes the Divine Liturgy. It begins with the reading of six of the Psalms of David and a part of the resurrection account from one of the Gospels. This is followed by the Canon, which includes the nine Odes (various hymns taken from the Bible). All the hymns and readings are ordered to the theme of our Lord’s resurrection. Matins ends with the Great Doxology, glorifying the

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[27]John Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians*, 3:4. Cited by Josef Jungmann in *The Early Liturgy* (Notre Dame:University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 197.

All-Holy Trinity. In its present make-up, Matins is a combination of two originally separate services: that of the early Dawn Service and the Matins service proper, which were divided by the recitation of Psalm 51.

KAIROS: THE ENTRANCE PRAYERS PRIOR TO THE DIVINE LITURGY

The ancient Greeks had two words for “time”: *chronos* and *kairos*. The modern Western mind thinks almost exclusively of time as *chronos*, which is sequential time, linear and moving in only one direction into the future. *Chronos* even forms the root of many English words like “chronological,” “chronology,” and “chronometer.” *Kairos*, on the other hand, is multidirectional and repeatable. Whereas *chronos* is linear, *kairos* is circular. *Kairos* is not time as we know it in this world; it is sacred time, time as experienced by the heavenly hosts. In *chronos*, the past and the future can only be said to “exist” in the abstract; in the fluidity of *kairos*, all aspects of time are immediate and accessible.

The deacon announces:

“It is *kairos* to begin the service of the Lord.”

Here *kairos* means the “propitious time;” in other words, the fitting time for the Lord to act and the fitting time for us to worship Him. This is not “propitious time” in the sense of the “opportune” or “convenient” moment, but as the only time in which the Lord can be approached. It points to the Messianic age, the kingdom of heaven which is “at hand,”[28] the proclamation of which is the very essence of the Church: “For He says, `In an acceptable time

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[28]Matthew 4:17.

(*kairos*) I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.'[29] Behold, now is the accepted time (*kairos*); behold, now is the day of salvation."[30]

The little service of Kairos is of relatively recent date, the older manuscripts of the Divine Liturgy starting instead with the Proskomide. It is likely that the Kairos service was originally the bishop's private blessing of the priest. The service involves kneeling toward the east (from whence we expect the Lord's coming) and the veneration of the holy icons.

When the Canon is read, the priest and the deacon, both being vested in an *exorasson* (a long black garment reaching from the shoulders to the ankles), come before the bishop's throne and make one *metania* (a prostration or deep bow). Then, standing on the solea before the closed Royal Doors[31], they make three metanias and start the entrance prayers. In two of these prayers, the priest's main request is for mercy from the Lord. When the priest says, "Open to us the door of your compassion, O blessed Theotokos[32]," the Royal Doors are opened.

The deacon then says the appropriate troparion[33] for each icon on the Iconostasis[34]: the icon of Christ, the icon of the Mother of God and the icon of John the Forerunner. The deacon then says the troparion before the icon of the patron saint of the Church. As the priest approaches the appropriate icon on the Iconostasis, he makes three

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[29]Isaiah 49:8.

[30]2 Corinthians 6:2.

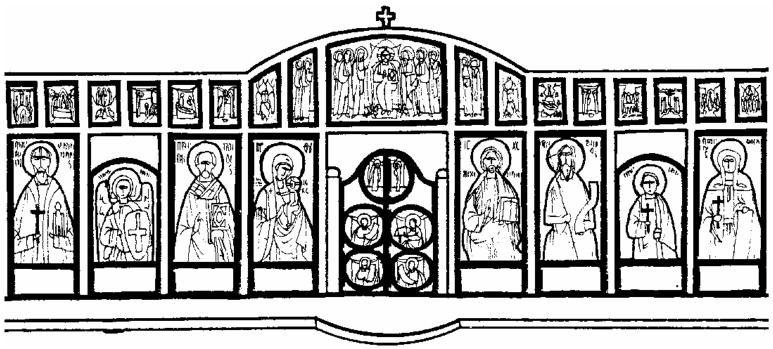
[31]The Royal Doors, also called the "Holy Doors," are the two doors in the center of the Iconostasis (the large icon screen) through which one can see the Holy Table.

[32]"Mother of God" or, more literally, "God-bearer" in Greek.

[33]The *troparion* is a short poetic verse of some three to thirteen lines. It was used as early as the year 400 in Alexandria.

[34]The Iconostasis is the large icon screen which separates the sanctuary from the nave, where the people are.

metanias and kisses it. After the veneration of the icons, the priest and deacon return to their places on the solea before the Royal Doors, and the priest asks the Lord to prepare him to fulfill the sacred, bloodless service without condemnation.



After reciting the dismissal, the priest enters the sanctuary through the north door of the Iconostasis while the deacon enters through the south door. The priest then recites Psalm 5:7:

"I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy, and in Your fear I will worship toward Your holy temple."

Then, standing before the Holy Table facing east, the priest says:

"I worship the one Godhead in three Persons, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, to the ages of ages. Amen."

The priest then kisses the Gospel book and the Holy Table, while the deacon kisses only the southwest corner of the Holy Table.

THE VESTING

Vestments indicate the profession, rank, and dignity of the wearer. During the first centuries of the Church, the clergy basically wore normal clothing, though it was the best clothing possible as befitting the sacred functions of the clergy. There is some interesting mid-second century evidence, though, that hints that specifically liturgical clothing may have been worn even during apostolic times. In a letter to bishop Victor of Rome, Polycrates, a bishop in Asia Minor, wrote that the apostle John was "a priest wearing the breastplate (Greek: *petalon*)."[35] The development of the specific liturgical vestments we know today started in the fourth century and continued to evolve until the ninth and tenth centuries. From the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, certain minor additions and alterations were made, but Orthodox vestments had for the most part settled into their present form around the end of the first millennium.

Each of the individual vestments has its own significance. The priest's tunic, called a *sticharion*, is the "garment of salvation" and a "robe of gladness;" and donning it the priest is described in the Liturgy as being crowned according to the Oriental wedding rite. The sticharion is believed to have always been white with stripes running across the sleeves and the body. Over the course of the centuries it became more ornate, probably influenced by the Imperial prototype of the Eastern Roman Empire. The material used, though, was a matter of taste. Today the sticharion of a priest or bishop is a simple tunic reaching to the feet and is made of plain silk or satin.

Orthodox vestments have a certain mystical significance, symbolically transforming the celebrant as he assumes them for liturgical

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[35] **Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5:14:3.**

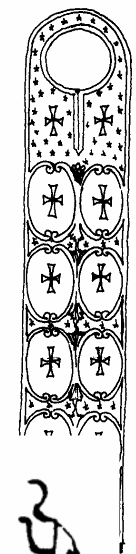
[36] **Matthew 22:13.**

Putting on the sticharion, the priest cites Isaiah 61:10:

"My soul shall rejoice in the Lord, for He has clothed me with the garment of salvation, and with the robe of gladness He has encompassed me. As a bridegroom He has set a crown upon me, and as a bride He has adorned me with an ornament."

The liturgical significance of the *stole* is to show forth the grace of the priesthood. It is a double orarion (a long band of brocade) worn around the neck with both ends reaching down to the bottom of the sticharion. It is adorned with crosses and has a fringe at both ends.

Symbolically, the stole represents the wings of the angels. It can also symbolize the robe of Aaron which was said to be fiery in appearance. The stole pictures the flesh of Christ as well, colored by His pure blood which He shed on the cross.



Blessing the stole and kissing it, the priest puts it on, paraphrasing Psalm 133:2:

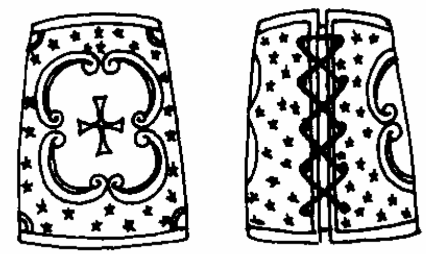
“Blessed is God, who pours out His grace upon His priests, as oil of myrrh on the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down over the fringe of his robe.”



The *zone* is a ceremonial girdle fastened at the back to hold the stole and the sticharion, thus facilitating bowing and kneeling. It signifies chastity, the mortification of the body, and the girding of the loins with the power of truth.

Blessing the belt and kissing it, the priest puts it on, saying:

“Blessed is God, who girds me with strength and has made my path blameless.”[37]



The two *cuffs*, which are embroided with crosses, are tied closely around the wrists so as to avoid interfering with liturgical activity.[38] The prayers used when donning the cuffs glorify the hands of the Lord in creating humanity and in shattering His enemies.

Blessing and kissing the right cuff, the priest quotes the Song of Moses from the book of Exodus:

“Your right hand, O Lord, is glorified in strength; Your right hand, O Lord, has shattered Your enemies, and in the multitude of Your glory You crushed Your adversaries.”[39]

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[37]Psalm 18:32.

[38]Since there is little evidence that the cuffs were used in early liturgical services, some liturgists believe that the cuffs were later adopted in direct imitation of the Emperor.

Blessing and kissing the left cuff, he recites a verse from Psalm 119:

"Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding and I will learn Your commandments."[40]

The *epigonation* is a square vestment suspended from one corner by a ribbon which runs across the chest from the left shoulder to the right side. While some believe that this ecclesiastical garment was simply borrowed from the Imperial uniform, it now has an altogether different and unconnected meaning: It represents the sword of Christ and His victory over death. A priest is granted the function of a confessor by receiving the epigonation in a special liturgical service.



If the priest has the dignity of the epigonation, he blesses it and kisses it, reciting Psalm 45:3:

"Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, in Your comeliness and Your beauty, and proceed prosperously, and be king because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and Your right hand shall guide You wondrously."

The *phelonion* is the outer garment covering the shoulders and is the chief vestment of a priest. Symbolically, it is the counterpart of the scarlet robe placed on Christ before the crucifixion.[41] The unbelted phelonion on the shoulders of the priest also reminds us of Christ going to His crucifixion carrying the cross on His shoulders.

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[39]**Exodus 15:6.**

[40]**Psalm 119:73.**

[41]**Matthew 27:27-31. Cf. Mark 15:16-20.**

Taking the phelonion, the priest blesses it, kisses it and puts it on reciting Psalm 132:9:
“Your priests, O Lord, shall be clothed with righteousness, and Your holy ones shall shout for joy.”



THE WASHING OF THE HANDS

The priest then prays that he may be judged worthy to celebrate the awesome eucharistic Mystery of Christ. Specifically, he asks that he may conduct the sacrifice with pure hands, with a pure heart, and with a pure tongue. The washing of hands is a symbolic gesture signifying the purity required of those who celebrate the Eucharist. Ablutions were a routine part of the Jewish tradition at the time of Christ; indeed, every pious person washed before praying. The early Church Fathers tell us that it was common for Christians to wash before private prayer. Also, when entering a church, Christians would wash their hands in large basins placed by the front doors. In the Non-Hierarchical Liturgy, priests do not wash their hands at the Great Entrance, as is the practice in the Hierarchical Liturgy. Instead, they wash their hands saying Psalm 26:6-12 before the Proskomide is begun.

Therefore, before performing the Proskomedia, the normal practice is for the priest and the deacon to wash their hands, saying:

“I will wash my hands in innocence and I will compass Your altar, O Lord, that I may hear the voice of Your praise and tell all Your wondrous works. O Lord, I have loved the beauty of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells. Destroy not my soul with the ungodly, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, in whose hands are iniquities; their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, in mine innocence have I walked; redeem me, O Lord, and have mercy on me. My foot has stood in uprightness; in the congregations will I bless You, O Lord."[42]

THE PROSKOMIDE (OR “PROTHESIS”)

The Liturgy of the Oblation performed before the Divine Liturgy, known as the Proskomide, prepares the offering of bread and wine on the Table of Oblation, which is called the Prothesis. The word “Proskomide” comes from the Greek word *proskomidzo*, meaning “to bring” or “to offer.” The Divine Liturgy can not be celebrated without the Proskomide.

Originally in the East, people deposited their offerings of bread and wine at the front of the church on their way inside. In the Hagia Sophia, the Imperial church of Constantinople, these gifts were prepared by the deacons in a small round building called the *skeuophylakion* at the north-east corner of the church. The deacons initially did everything: they received the gifts, sorted them, prepared them, finally bringing them into the church and up to the altar at the Great Entrance. The performance of the Proskomide by the deacon -- and not the priest -- was continued until the fourteenth century. The preparation of the gifts became a full blown rite around the time of Saint Maximus

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[42]**Psalm 26:6-12.**

the Confessor in the early seventh century. By the time of Saint Germanus in the eighth century, the Proskomide had acquired a definite symbolic significance.

The reason for offering the gifts during the Proskomide is to give thanks to God and to make supplication to Him. The Proskomide service is ministered on the Prothesis, a table built into the wall of the apse. The Prothesis is situated on the left side as one faces the Iconostasis from the nave. The apse of the Prothesis symbolizes the manger.

The bread which is to be changed into Christ's Body is separated from the rest of the loaves by the priest, who places it on the holy Diskos (paten) and consecrates it (sets it apart) to God. He then carries it to the altar and offers it up. This round loaf of bread, which is made of pure wheat, is called the *prosphora* (the "offering" or "gift") and is stamped on the top with a special seal (called the *Sphragis* or *Panagiari*). The bread must also be leavened, leaven symbolizing our participation in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God who became man. The Orthodox also see leaven as manifesting the Church as the Body of Christ, which only exists insofar as it participates in the leavened eucharistic Body of Christ. This recalls what Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven."[43] The Orthodox Church tends to see unleavened bread as a symbolic relapsing into the Old Covenant, denying the Incarnation and consequently the salvific grace of the Gospel.[44]

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[43]Matthew 13:33.

[44]This is not to suggest, however, that a valid Eucharist couldn't be offered using unleavened bread.

The Prothesis signifies the place of Calvary, where Jesus was “offered up” to God. Calvary was prefigured in the Old Testament by Abraham when God commanded him to make an altar of stone on a mountain, collect wood, and sacrifice his son on it. In his mercy, though, God allowed a ram to be offered instead. This was to show that the Father was pleased to allow, in “the fullness of time,”[45] His eternal Son to be incarnate of the pure virgin Theotokos and to be sacrificed for our sins. Though in His divinity He remained impassible (not subject to pain), nevertheless, as a man Christ suffered all His torments to the fullest -- and gladly because of His immense love for us.

The Discos on which the bread is placed, according to the eighth century Patriarch of Constantinople, Saint Germanus, “represents the hands of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who buried Christ. The Discos on which Christ is carried is also interpreted as the sphere of heaven, manifesting to us in miniature the spiritual sun, Christ, and containing Him visibly in the bread. The Chalice corresponds to the vessel which received the mixture [of water and blood] which poured from the bloodied, undefiled side and from the hands and feet of Christ. Or again, the Chalice corresponds to the bowl which the Lord depicts, that is, Wisdom; because the Son of God has mixed His blood for drinking instead of wine, and set forth on His holy table, saying to all: `Drink of my blood mixed for you for the remission of sins and eternal life.’”[46]



The cover on the Discos represents the cloth which covered Christ's face in the tomb. The veil, or the *aer*, is a rectangular ornamented veil for covering both the Chalice and Diskos after the Proskomide. The aer corresponds to the stone which Joseph placed over the entrance of the tomb and which Pilate’s guards then sealed. It can also represent the shroud which contained the Lord’s body.

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[45]Cf. Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:10.

[46]Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, 38-39.

Christ assumed the entirety of our human nature, except for sin.[47] The bread which is offered in the Liturgy signifies the super-abundant goodness of our God, who became man and gave Himself as an offering for the life of the world. Jesus Himself made this connection between His Incarnation and bread when He identified Himself as the manna which God sent to the Israelites in the desert: "I am the bread which came down from heaven," He said in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John. "He who eats this bread will live for ever."[48]

The priest and the deacon reverence the Prothesis, and then the priest removes the red cover from the Chalice and the Diskos, laying it to one side. As he does so, he says:

"Make ready, O Bethlehem, for Eden has been opened for all. Prepare, Ephratha, for the tree of life has blossomed forth in the cave from the Virgin; her womb became a spiritual Paradise in which is planted the divine Plant. For in eating from the Plant we will live, and not die as did Adam. Christ will be born to raise the image that fell of old."

Everything now being prepared, the priest then says:

"You have redeemed us from the curse of the Law,[49] by Your precious Blood; being nailed to the cross and pierced with the spear, You have poured forth immortality upon humanity: Our Savior, glory to You."

Holding the offering with both hands, the priest elevates it and makes the sign of the cross with it over the Chalice and Diskos, saying:

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[47]Hebrews 4:15.

[48]John 6:51.

[49]Galatians 3:13.

“Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages.”

The priest next picks up an instrument called the “spear” or the “lance.” This small metal knife which is designed to look like a spear was probably introduced sometime around the ninth century. Holding the loaf in his left hand and the spear in his right, the priest makes the sign of the cross with the spear three times over the loaf, saying each time:

“In remembrance of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The priest thus recalls the Lord’s command, “Do this in remembrance of me.” This command applies not only to the gifts being consecrated, but to the Liturgy as a whole. We are to “do” the Liturgy “in remembrance” of all that Christ did to achieve our salvation, even those events (indeed, especially those events!) which seem to denote nothing but weakness: His Cross, His Passion, and His Death.

In the center of the bread is the square section which we described above as the “seal” stamped onto the prosphora. This is known as the “Lamb” because it is the part which shall be changed into the Body of Christ. On the Lamb is written “IC XC NIKA,” which is a Greek abbreviation meaning, “Jesus Christ Conquers.” This strange paradox of the “Lamb” which “conquers” recalls the vision of John in the Book of Revelation, where those who follow the beast “make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called chosen, and faithful”[50]

Taking the spear and cutting along the right edge of the Lamb (on the priest's left), the priest says, echoing the prophecy in Isaiah:

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[50]**Revelation 17:14.**

"Like the Lamb that is led to the slaughter."[51]

The lamb normally symbolizes, among other things, helplessness, innocence and gentleness. When the image of a lamb is used figuratively of a person, it arouses sympathy, concern, pity and compassion for that person. In the Old Testament, the lamb is a symbol of Israel and the Lord is called their Shepherd, as in Psalm 23. The lamb is also the sacrificial victim brought as an offering to God for the salvation of the Chosen People, and the blood of these offerings was used to cleanse the sanctuary in the Temple. In the Old Testament the sacrifice of a lamb is at the heart of the most important Jewish feast of all, the Passover. Indeed, all the major feasts of the Israelites call for the sacrifice of a lamb.

John the Baptist twice greets Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel of John with the title, "the Lamb of God." At the end of the same gospel, Jesus is crucified on the afternoon before the Feast of Passover began, while the Passover lambs were slain.[52] Jesus is the Lamb of the New Passover, through Whom we "pass over" from death to life. In heaven at the right hand of the Father, our Lord still bears the wounds of His Passion, by which He triumphed over sin and death.

Cutting along the left edge of the Lamb, the priest says, citing Isaiah 53:7 from the Greek Septuagint:

"And like a blameless sheep that before its shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth."

Cutting along the upper edge of the Lamb, the priest cites the next verse in Isaiah:

"In His humiliation right judgment was denied Him."[53]

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[51]Isaiah 53:7.

[52]Cf. John 13:1; 19:14, 31, 42.

[53]Isaiah 53:8 (LXX).

Cutting along the lower edge of the Lamb, the priest continues reciting Isaiah 53:8:

“Who could have told His posterity?”

This cutting of the loaf is done for practical reasons, so that the Host may be removed. It has a symbolic value also -- it represents our Lord's passing from the world to His Father, as He Himself said, “I leave the world, and go to the Father.”[54]

Piercing the bread at the right corner of the seal and cutting away the bottom crust, the priest removes the Lamb from the loaf and finishes citing Isaiah 53:8:

“For His life is taken up from the earth.”

The priest turns the Lamb over on the Diskos, placing the face of the seal downward. He then makes a deep cross-wise cut on the back of the Lamb without cutting through it. As he does this, the priest repeats the words of John the Baptist:

“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,[55] is sacrificed for the life of the world[56] and its salvation.”

The priest then turns the Lamb over once more so that the seal is now upward. Inserting the spear in the right side of the section marked IC, the Greek initials for “Jesus,” the priest quotes the testimony of John the Theologian:

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[54]**John 16:28.**

[55]**John 1:29.**

[56]**John 6:51.**

"One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out; and he who saw this has testified, and his testimony is true."[57]

This incision in the bread made by the spear represents the wound in the Savior's side. The wine and the water used in the Proskomide are the blood and the water which came forth, as we saw the apostle John testify to above.

As the deacon pours the wine and water into the Chalice, the priest blesses the deacon with the sign of the cross:

"Blessed is the union of Your Holy Gifts."

Thus in the Proskomide the priest shows the Lord's Passion, how He died, how His side was pierced with a lance, and how blood and water flowed from His side. The aim of all this is to link the Eucharist and the historical Jesus and to foreshadow the coming eucharistic sacrifice.

Our communion with Jesus Christ can not be properly understood without also comprehending the doctrine of the communion of saints. The Apostle said to the Corinthians, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."[58] Thus the Liturgy is not only a *Communio in Sacris*, the Communion of the Holy Gifts, but is also a *Communio Sanctorum*, the communion of saints.
The Church is called the Body of Christ in the New Testament, so the priest cuts out pieces from the Lamb -- which will become the eucharistic Body of Christ -- to represent the whole Church, both those now living and those who are living with Christ in His kingdom, whom Saint Paul calls "the Church of the firstborn, who are

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[57]John 19:34-35.

[58]1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

written in heaven."[59] These pieces are placed on the Diskos around the Lamb, showing that Christ is the center of the Church. In this way, along with the Eucharist, we are mystically presenting ourselves to God as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God."[60]

The first piece the priest cuts out represents the Theotokos. The Virgin Mary was put in a unique relationship to God on account of her role in the divine plan of salvation. From her the New Adam was born, and very often she is described in the Church as the new Eve, the new mother of the new humanity. Taking up the Lamb, the priest cuts from the left side of it a small triangular piece, saying:

"In honor and memory of our most blessed and glorious Lady, Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, through whose intercessions accept, O Lord, this sacrifice upon Your most heavenly altar."

Lifting this piece, he places it on the Diskos to the right (his left) of the Lamb, saying, in imagery taken from the Psalms:

"At Your right hand the queen stood, clothed in a robe of gold, arrayed in varied colors."[61]

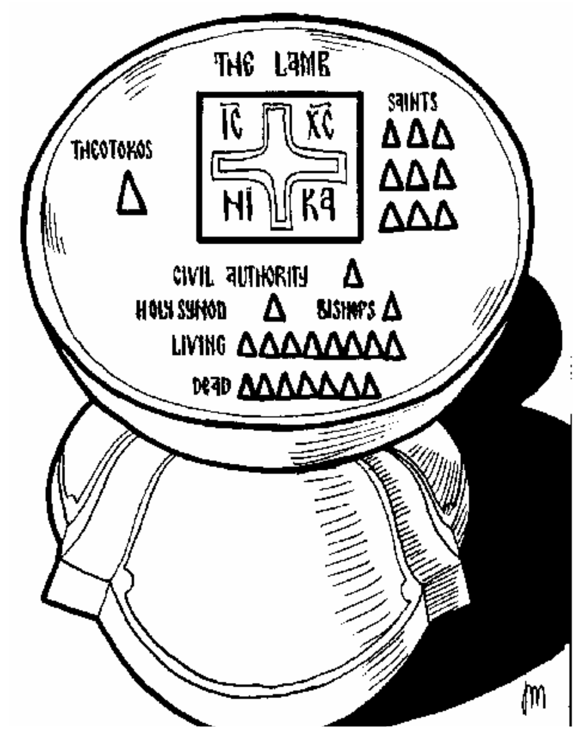
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[59] **Hebrews 12:23.**

[60] **Romans 12:1.**

[61] **Psalm 45:9.**

Then the priest takes nine pieces and puts them on the left side of the Lamb in honor of the angels and saints. Although in some manuscripts of the Liturgy the angels are not always ranked according to the traditional nine orders, it later became customary to list them this way, in descending order of rank.



Taking up the Lamb, the priest cuts from it a small piece, the first of the nine, and he places it on the Diskos immediately to the left (his right) of the Lamb. He then says:

“In honor and memory of the great angelic leaders Michael and Gabriel and of all the bodiless powers of heaven.”

The second of the nine pieces is dedicated to the saints of the Old Testament. These saints are also saints of the Church, for they anticipated Jesus. Indeed, all of them in some way foretold the coming of the Messiah in their prophecies. The saints of the Old Covenant knew Christ because He revealed Himself to them and they in turn believed in Him. The new Christian saints in this regard are simply a continuation of the line of saints from the Old Testament, there being a unity to the divine plan throughout both the Old and New Covenants.

Taking the second piece, the priest places it on the Diskos below the first piece, saying:

“Of the honorable, glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John; of the holy glorious prophets Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, David and Jesse; of the Three Holy Children, Daniel the Prophet and of all the holy prophets;”

The third piece is dedicated to the apostles, who were the actual followers and witnesses of Jesus. Paul wrote that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."[62] The Church is said to be "apostolic" because the Faith which was once and for all delivered to the apostles[63] continues in their successors, those bishops who can trace their succession back to the apostles, thus keeping the Church in the apostolic Faith.

Taking a third piece, the priest places it on the Diskos below the second, saying:

"Of the holy, glorious and all-laudable apostles Peter and Paul; of the Twelve, the Seventy and all the holy apostles and equals-to-the-apostles."

The fourth piece is dedicated to the great Fathers of the Church, who were like heavenly stars upon the earth. The Fathers are those bishops and Christian writers of the first centuries who either had direct contact with the apostles or who were able through the Holy Spirit to express in a particularly compelling manner the apostolic Faith for the Church. Through them, God guided the Church in the true Faith, protecting the Body of Christ from dangerous heresies.

Taking the fourth piece, the priest places it on the Diskos next to the first, saying:

"Of our fathers among the saints, great hierarchs and universal teachers Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom; Athanasius, Cyril and John the Merciful, patriarchs of Alexandria; of Nicholas of Myra; Spyridon of Trimythous; and Nectarius of Pentapolis and of all the holy hierarchs."

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[62]**Ephesians 2:20.**

[63]**Jude 3.**

The fifth piece is dedicated to the martyrs who, out of love, willingly offered themselves as sacrifices. A martyrs' death is a victory, the victory of a love which is stronger than death. As Solomon wrote in the Song of Songs, "For love is as strong as death . . . its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame."[64] The martyr loves his Lord with a love which consumes even suffering in its flames; a love which burns vehemently to the point of sacrificial death, when the victory of love over hatred is complete.

Taking a fifth piece, the priest places it on the Diskos below the fourth, saying:

"Of the holy protomartyr and archdeacon Stephen; of the holy, glorious great martyrs, George the victorious, Demetrius the myrrh-streaming, Theodore the Soldier and Theodore the General; of the hieromartyrs, Polycarp, Ignatius the God-bearer of Antioch, Haralampus and Eleftherius; of the holy women martyrs, Thekla, Barbara, Anastasia, Katherine, Kyriaki, Photeini, Marina, Paraskeva and Irene and of all the holy hieromartyrs, right-victorious martyrs and confessors."

The sixth piece is dedicated to the ascetics who, in the words of the Apostle, "Put on the whole armor of God...and wrestled not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age."[65] Unless of our own free will we imitate Christ's Passion, living and dying as our Lord did, His life is not

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[64]Song of Songs 8:6.

[65]Ephesians 6:11-17.

in us.[66] The ascetics have the same attitude as did Paul, who wrote, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His Body, which is the Church.”[67]

Taking a sixth piece, the priest places it on the Diskos below the fifth, saying:

“Of our venerable and God-bearing fathers who shone in the ascetic life, Anthony the Great, Euthymius, Paisius, Sabbas the Sanctified, Theodosius the head of monasteries, Onouphrius, Athanasius and Peter of Athos, and of all venerable men and women.”

The seventh piece is dedicated to the healers of the Church. They were always moved by compassion and ready to act, casting out spirits and curing the sick. God's acts of healing are victories over fallen human nature and over all evil spirits. In essence, by giving us a foretaste of when sickness and death will be finally overcome at the general resurrection, the gift of healing heralds the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of heaven.

Taking the seventh piece, the priest places it on the Diskos next to the fourth, saying:

“Of the holy, glorious Cosmas and Damian who performed cures without taking payment, Cyrus and John, Panteleimon and Hermolaos and of all the holy, selfless healers.”

The eighth piece is dedicated to the ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna (the parents of the Theotokos), for Mary’s purity and holiness are a testimony to her upbringing. She who gave birth to Christ was embellished with

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[66]In this regard, it is instructive to hear what the third bishop of Antioch after the apostle Peter, Saint Ignatius (martyred A.D. 110), has to say on the subject. As he was being led to his martyrdom in Rome, he wrote to the church in Magnesia: “For, just as there are two coinages (cf. Matt 22:19-21), the one of God, the other of the world, and each has its own stamp impressed on it, so the unbelievers bear the stamp of this world, and the believers the stamp of God the Father in love through Jesus Christ, and unless we willingly choose to die after the likeness of His Passion, His life is not in us” (*Epistle to the Magnesians,* 5:1).

[67]Colossians 1:24.

all virtues through their parenting. Consequently the Mother of God, while remaining a part of God's Creation, was chosen by God to be raised above every creature.

The eighth piece is also dedicated to Joseph the Betrothed, who was the virtuous guardian of Mary's virginity, and to Simeon the God-receiver, who awaited the coming of God in the flesh.[68] It is dedicated as well to the patron saint of the local church and to the rest of the saints.

Taking the eighth piece, the priest places it on the Diskos below the seventh, saying:

"Of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; (of Joseph the Betrothed and Simeon the God-receiver); of (Name of the saint of the day), whose memory we celebrate this day; of (Name of patron saint of church) and of all the saints, at whose supplications, visit us, O God, and grant all of our petitions which are for salvation and life eternal."

The ninth piece is dedicated to the author of the Divine Liturgy, Saint John Chrysostom, who reposed in 409. Although some parts were added to the Liturgy after his falling asleep in the Lord, the preponderance of the Liturgy was either written or revised by him. John, who became the archbishop of Constantinople in 398, acquired his name *Chrysostom* ("Golden Mouth") because of his eloquent preaching of the Gospel as a priest at Antioch.

Taking the ninth piece, the priest places it on the Diskos below the eighth, saying:

"Of our father among the saints (John Chrysostom,[69]archbishop of Constantinople)."[70]

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[68]Cf. Luke 2:25ff.

[69]Or Basil the Great, archbishop of Caesarea, if the Liturgy of Saint Basil is celebrated.

[70]If there is to be a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, the priest now covers the Diskos and Chalice with the aer, leaving the prothesis for the bishop to complete the Proskomidia.

Taking up the loaf, the priest commemorates the living, taking a piece for each person and placing them on the Diskos in a row, beneath the letters NIKA (meaning “conquers” in Greek) on the Lamb. As he does this, the priest prays:

“Remember, O Master, Lover of humanity, every Orthodox bishop who rightly divides the word of Your truth;[71] our metropolitan (or archbishop or bishop [Name]); the honorable presbytery, the deaconate in Christ and every priestly and monastic order (and our brethren and concelebrants, priests, [Names], and deacons, [Names]); and all our brotherhood whom You have called into Your communion, through Your tender compassion, O all-gracious Master.”

The priest then remembers the bishop(s) who ordained him, his sponsors in ordination (if living), as well as his confessor and others among the living. He places a piece for each on the Diskos, saying each time:

“Remember, O Lord, Your servant, [Name].”

The kingdom has yet to be obtained by the living; they are still running the race, so their eternal lot is still unknown. The same doubt exists for those who have passed away without a certain hope of salvation; therefore, the Church prays for them as well. This is the counterpoint to the Church’s commemoration of the Lord’s death and of the departed saints who have obtained the fullness of salvation. The Church gives thanks for Christ's saving actions in the saints and intercedes on behalf of all those for whom salvation is uncertain.

Taking up the Lamb, the priest commemorates the departed, cutting out a piece for each. Placing the pieces on the Diskos in a row, beneath the pieces of the living, he says:

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[71] **2 Timothy 2:15.**

“Again we pray for the blessed memory and forgiveness of sins of all patriarchs, bishops, priests, deacons, monastics, and every priestly and monastic order; the blessed and ever-memorable founders and benefactors of this holy house, and the priests and deacons who have served therein; and our Orthodox fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in Your communion in the hope of resurrection to eternal life, O Lord, Lover of humanity.”

The supplication which seeks the forgiveness of sins and the repose of souls comes last of all. It is in the very nature of gratitude to refrain from mentioning our needs until we have remembered what we have already received. We must always first give thanks to God and praise Him, thus setting His glory above our own desires.

The priest then remembers, if they have reposed in the Lord, the bishop(s) who ordained him and his sponsors in ordination. He may also remember others who have departed, placing a piece for each on the Diskos, saying for each:

“Remember, O Lord, Your servant, [Name].”

The deacon may now remember whom he will of the living and the departed, the priest taking a piece from the Lamb for each. The priest then removes one piece from the Lamb and places it on the Diskos with those of the living, saying:

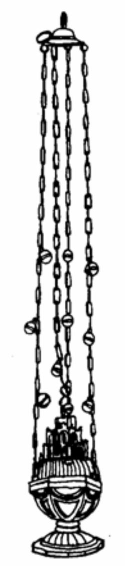
“Remember, O Lord, my unworthiness, and forgive my transgressions, both voluntary and involuntary.”

The priest then kisses the spear and puts it aside.[72] Next, the priest blesses the censer, saying:

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[72]**If other priests are concelebrating, they may now approach the prothesis, make three metanias, reverence the prothesis, take up the spear and remember whom they desire of the living and the departed.**

"Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Incense we offer to You, O Christ our God, as a fragrant spiritual offering[73] which You receive upon Your most heavenly altar and send down upon us in return the grace of Your all-holy Spirit."



The censer symbolizes the humanity of Christ while the burning coal represents His divinity. The interior of the censer is understood as the sanctified womb of the holy virgin Theotokos who bore the divine coal, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."[74] Another way of looking at the censer is to see the interior as the baptismal font which takes into itself the coal of the divine fire exuding the sweet odor of salvation, the sweet operation of the Holy Spirit in whom we receive divine grace through faith.

In the first few centuries of the Church's existence, Christian worship was devoid of incense because of its association with paganism and emperor worship. But as the memory of paganism receded, incense was eventually introduced into the Christian Liturgy, probably around the sixth century. Is this an example of a pagan infiltration into "biblical" Christianity, as some Protestant Fundamentalists contend?

Quite the contrary! As paganism ceased being a threat to the Faith, people became more conscious that in the Bible incense was a regular part of Jewish worship. In fact, the word "incense" occurs some 124 times in the Old Testament alone. The Book of Exodus, for example, gives detailed instructions for an altar reserved exclusively for offering incense.[75] The altar was square and made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and with golden horns at each

[73]**Ephesians 5:2.**

[74]**Colossians 2:9.**

[75]**Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38; 37:25-29.**

corner. When the Temple was built, the altar of incense stood in the center of an area called the Holy Place before the veil hiding the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies.[76] It was this same altar that the angel Gabriel stood next to when Zacharias, the father of John the Forerunner, went into the Temple to burn incense.[77]

The priest's task was to place the incense on a heated coal on the altar and then prostrate himself in prayer. This was done each day early in the morning and at dusk. To do this was not granted to all priests, but only to those descended from Aaron, the elder brother of Moses. It also fell to Aaron, as the first high priest of Israel, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) to slay a bull as a sin offering in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Then, according to Leviticus, "he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil (the giant curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place). And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony (i.e., Ark of the Covenant), lest he dies."[78]

To burn incense at the altar in the Temple was obviously a great privilege. The first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus tells the story of how Uzziah, the king of Judah, "put on the holy garment and went into the Temple to offer incense to God upon the golden altar, which was prohibited to do by Azariah the high priest, who had four-score priests with him, and who told [king Uzziah] that it was not lawful for him to offer sacrifice, and that `none besides the posterity of Aaron were permitted to do so.'...In the meantime, a great earthquake shook the ground, and a rent was made in the Temple, and the bright rays of the sun shone through it, and fell upon the king's face, insomuch that the leprosy seized upon him immediately; and before the city, at a place called Eroge, half the

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[76] The Ark was a rectangular box made of acacia wood covered with gold and topped by two cherubim (angels) overlooking the "mercy seat" between them. The Ark contained the tablets on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod (Cf. Hebrews 9:4).

[77] Luke 1:9-11.

[78] Leviticus 16:12-13.

mountain broke off from the rest on the west, and rolled itself four furlongs, and stood still at the east mountain, till the roads, as well as the king's gardens, were spoiled by the destruction."[79] The "historicity" of this account is irrelevant; what is to be noted is how awesome it was considered in ancient Israel to offer incense to God -- so much so that only certain people could offer it without incurring the divine wrath, the king himself obviously not being one of them.

Among other things, incense in the Bible is associated with the "prayers of the saints" before the throne of God, as it is in the Book of Revelation.[80] Thus was introduced the singing of Psalm 141:2 while incensing the church during the evening Vesper service: "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." So the truth of the matter is that incense was introduced into Christian worship once the Church became less influenced by the threat of paganism and began to be influenced more by the Bible.

In the Proskomide, the bread remains bread and has received no more than the capacity to be offered to God during the Eucharistic Liturgy. The bread typifies the Lord's body in His early years, for Christ was an offering to the Father from His birth. This is why the priest now symbolically re-enacts over the bread the miracles surrounding Christ when He was but a new-born lying in a manger. Placing what is known as the *asterisk* -- a cover made of two arched metal bands forming a cross having a small star dangling from the center -- over the Diskos, he says:

"And lo, the star stood over where the child was."[81]

The priest holds the asterisk over the incense, kisses it, and then places it on the Diskos, saying:

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[79]**Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 9:10:4.**

[80]**Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4.**

[81]**Matthew 2:9.**

“The star stopped over the place where the Child was.”[82]

Then the priest goes on to recite the ancient prophecies concerning Christ’s divinity, for the human Child was also “Immanuel,” meaning, “God With Us.”[83] The priest then says, “At the word of the Lord the heavens were established.[84] The Lord reigned, clothed in beauty,[85]" and, “His virtue covers the heavens and the earth is full of His understanding.”[86] While he is saying this, the priest covers the Diskos and the Chalice with fine veils and censes them on all sides. In like manner was the Incarnate God veiled till the heavenly witness of the Father and the Holy Spirit (in the form of a dove) at His baptism in the Jordan.

The priest holds the veil for the Diskos over the incense, kisses it and then places it over the asterisk, reciting Psalm 93:1:

“The Lord is King, He is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in beauty, and He is girded with strength. For He established the world; it shall never be shaken.”

The priest holds the veil for the Chalice over the incense, kisses it, and then places it over the Chalice, quoting the prophet Habakkuk:

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[82]**Ibid.**

[83]**Isaiah 7:14.**

[84]**Psalm 33:6.**

[85]**Psalm 93:1.**

[86]**Cf. Habakkuk 3:3.**

"Your power covered the heavens, O Christ, and the earth is full of Your praise."[87]

The priest holds the aer over the incense, kisses it, and then places it over the gifts, saying:

"Shelter us, O God, in the shelter of Your wings;[88] drive away from us every enemy and foe; make our life peaceful; O Lord, have mercy on us and on Your world, and save our souls, for You are good and You love humanity, and are a merciful God."

The priest takes the censer and censes the gifts, saying thrice:

"Blessed is our God who is thus pleased:[89] Glory to You."
Then the priest says:

"O God, our God, who sent forth the heavenly Bread, the Food to the whole world,[90] our Lord and God Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer and Benefactor, blessing and sanctifying us: Bless this oblation, and receive it upon Your most heavenly altar. Remember, as You are good and love humanity, those who brought this offering and those for whom they brought it. Preserve us blameless in the celebration of Your divine mysteries; for sanctified and glorified is Your most honorable and majestic name, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages."

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[87]**Ibid.**

[88]**Psalm 17:8.**

[89]**Cf. Isaiah 42:21.**

[90]**Psalm 136:25.**

The priest makes three metanias before the Prothesis, and then kisses the Diskos, the Chalice, and the cross on the aer, saying:

“Holy God: the unoriginate Father (the priest kisses the Diskos);

“Holy Mighty: the co-eternal Son (the priest kisses the Chalice);

“Holy Immortal: the all-holy Spirit (the priest kisses the cross on the aer);

“O Holy Trinity: Glory to You."

The priest then says the dismissal of the Proskomide.

II. THE DIVINE LITURGY

The preparation for the Divine Liturgy reaches its peak when the Great Doxology is chanted in majesty at the end of the Matins service, with the priest and the deacon quietly joining in. Starting with the hymn of the angels from the beginning of the Gospel, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and good will among men,”[91] the Great Doxology is among the most beautiful hymns of the Orthodox Church. Since the Great Doxology cannot be found before the fourteenth century, liturgists have concluded that it was introduced after the Proskomide began to be interpreted as symbolizing the Nativity of Christ.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LITURGY

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[91] Luke 2:14.

There is a basic structure to the Liturgy which provides points of reference to help us understand and participate in what is occurring. Throughout its two thousand year history, different liturgical traditions have appeared in the Orthodox world which eventually gave the Divine Liturgy its present structure. Liturgical traditions from Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem have been especially prominent in the evolution of the Liturgy. These changes, additions and subtractions have been due to various local, cultural and historical circumstances.

Our present Liturgy is customarily ascribed to Saint John Chrysostom, who reformed the Liturgy in Constantinople at the end of the fourth century. There is a tradition that around 397, when John Chrysostom came from Antioch to Constantinople to be its patriarch, Chrysostom simply took the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great and shortened it. The period after the death of John Chrysostom, the fifth and sixth centuries, was a time of especially profound liturgical development in the Church and shaped the Liturgy even further.

As a result of this rich development, things were very different in the ancient Church than they are today. For example: The Liturgy at one time started at the back of the church in the vestibule (*narthex*). After 528, the solemn entrance of the congregation began to be accompanied by the singing of the hymn, “Only-begotten Son.” There was also a reading from the Old Testament before the Epistle. The Scripture readings were eventually reduced to two, an Epistle and a Gospel, preceded by the Trisagion. Around 574, the Cherubic Hymn was introduced during the Great Entrance. Originally after the Great Entrance, the catechumens were supposed to leave and the doors were locked. Yet, despite these and other major changes, we find that the essence of the Liturgy has remained stable through the centuries, having been firmly established in the early years of the Church. As in antiquity, the Liturgy is still divided into two basic parts: the Liturgy of the Catechumens (also called the *Synaxis*, literally “the gathering”), and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

THE OPENING PRAYER

Just before the opening portion of the Liturgy, the priest says the Opening Prayer:

"O heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, everywhere present, and filling all things, treasury of blessings, and Giver of Life, come and dwell in us, cleanse us from every impurity and save our souls, O Good One."

This is followed by:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.[92] (*Two times*) O Lord open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.[93] (*One time*)"[94]

III. THE LITURGY OF THE CATECHUMENS

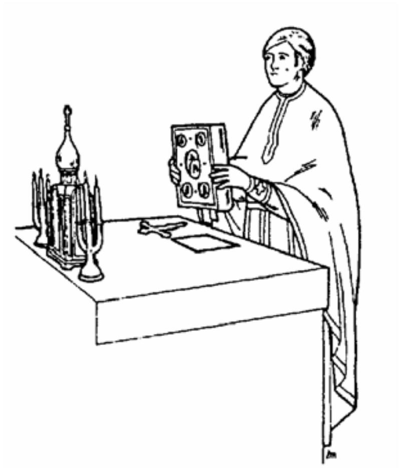
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[92]Ibid.

[93]Psalm 51:15.

[94]If the deacon is serving, the following dialogue takes place --
***Deacon*: It is time for the Lord to act.**
***Priest:* Blessed is our God always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages.**
***Deacon:* Pray for me, master.**
***Priest:* May the Lord direct your steps to every good work.**
***Deacon:* Remember me, holy master.**
***Priest:* May the Lord remember you in his kingdom, always, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.**

Like all prayer, the Liturgy begins with a doxology:



"Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages."

Note that the priest doesn't merely say, "Blessed is God," but, "Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." It isn't simply "God" who is praised, but each divine Person. From the very beginning of the Liturgy, the Trinity shines forth and is proclaimed. Communication with God consists of doxology, thanksgiving, confession, and petition. The first is doxology because, when grateful servants approach their Master, it is fitting to concentrate on the Master Himself. Such is the nature of the doxology: it is a tribute of praise offered to the Holy Trinity. In the doxology we lay aside ourselves and all our interests and glorify the Holy Trinity for God's own sake, for His power and His glory. Immediately upon approaching the Trinity, we recognize the force and grandeur of the glory and we are filled with wonder and awe. Our initial response is naturally praise.

The doxology has always held a central place in Christian spirituality. Origen in the mid-third century writes concerning the place of doxologies in prayer: "In the beginning and the preface of the prayer something having the force of praise should be said of God through Christ, who is praised with Him, and by the Holy Spirit, who is hymned with Him....And, finally, the prayer should be concluded with a doxology of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit."[95] Thus the doxology has both first and last place in any communication with God.

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[95] **Origen of Alexandria, *On Prayer*, 23:1.**

Christ commenced His ministry by preaching “the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, `The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.’”[96] Christ commanded us to “seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.”[97] Since Christ commanded that this be the first thing that we seek, the Liturgy begins with the blessing of the kingdom. Indeed, before anything else, the Liturgy can only begin when we seek the reign of God in our hearts. “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”[98]

After the doxology come the petitions. This follows the doxology so that we may be confident that our requests will be granted, for we have just learned something of God's goodness and His love for us by confessing “the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” These petitions are presented in the form of a litany.

THE GREAT *EKTENIA* (OR “THE LITANY OF PEACE”)

The litany, also called an “ektenia” in the Eastern Liturgy, originated in Antioch during the fourth century. The inclusion of litanies into the Liturgy may be connected to the practice of having processions around the city in times of disaster or distress. Each time the procession halted, the deacon leading the way would cry, “Lord, have mercy!” From Antioch, litanies spread to Constantinople and to the rest of the East. They were the public prayer of the Faithful led by the deacon to express devotion, petitions and thanksgiving.

The Great Ektenia at the beginning of the Liturgy starts with:

“In peace let us pray to the Lord.”

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[96]Mark 1:14-15.

[97]Matthew 6:33.

[98]Luke 12:32.

Immediately after the doxology, and before we make confession or give thanks, we are exhorted to allow the peace of God to rule in our hearts.[99] The priest (or deacon) bids the people to pray, leading them as their representative. As the representative of the people, the priest ought to be blameless and holy because, as the apostle James says, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."[100]

The response of people is, "Lord, have mercy," or in Greek, *Kyrie eleison*. This is indeed the supplication of those who have no possible defense or justification; and so they petition the Judge, appealing to His love of humanity. This prayer implies both gratitude and confession. To beg God's mercy is to ask for His rule in our lives, that is, His kingdom. It is that same kingdom which Christ promised to those who would follow Him.

Expressions like, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord," are common in both the Old[101] and New[102] Testaments, and it would seem that the liturgical use of, "Lord have mercy," in some form probably goes back to apostolic times. Yet, curiously, it is difficult to establish its existence before the fourth century. It was only in the fifth century that its use spread westward (in its Greek form of *Kyrie eleison*) into Rome, France and Spain. Yet Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) still had to defend the invocation in his day against Western bishops who protested its use as a "Greek importation."

Then the priest (or deacon) prays:

"For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord."

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[99]Cf. Colossians 3:15.

[100]James 5:16.

[101]E.g., Psalm 6:2; 9:13.

[102]E.g., Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31.

When the priest prays for “the salvation of our souls,” he again signifies “the kingdom,” for the kingdom consists of those who are saved. And when the priest prays for “peace from above,” he points to the righteousness of God, without which peace is impossible. The world can not know this peace because it refuses to know the righteousness of God.

Saint Paul says that “the peace of God passes all understanding.”[103] The peace of God is beyond all human concepts of peace. This peace isn’t merely an absence of violence; it is the peace which the Lord left to the apostles when he ascended to the Father. “Peace I leave with you,” He said. “My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”[104]

He who is not at peace cannot pray aright. When we are at peace we can make petitions for others, not only for the Church and those in adversity, but for all of humanity. “Let us pray for the peace of the whole world,” says the priest in the third petition. Since as Christians we know that our God is the Lord of all, and that all things are in His care, we are under a special obligation. Thus we are commanded to pray to God in peace, and above all to ask for the peace from above.

Then the priest prays for the “holy house,” the local church or chapel which is a tabernacle of the Lord. The church signifies the presence of God in the midst of His people. The priest prays for those who enter it with faith, reverence, and the fear of God: the three elements essential for salvation.

The priest then exhorts every one to pray for the clergy who oversee and feed the sheep, the people of God who are a chosen generation and a holy nation.[105] And we do not ask only for the things of the spirit, but also for

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[103] **Philippians 4:7.**

[104] **John 14:27.**

[105] **1 Peter 2:9.**

material needs: for health and an abundance of the fruits of the earth. God is the Creator and Provider of all things and we must always look to Him for our needs.

The Litany climaxes when the priest (or deacon) asks the congregation to commit themselves, one another, and their whole lives to Christ our God. Thus we should confidently commit ourselves into God's hands, in the sure hope that He will accept our trust in Him. Since this commendation of our whole selves to God is so important, it is not made until we have first summoned to our aid the most holy Mother of God and the choir of all the saints. What we are really asking for is the unity of faith and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Only once we have summoned the entire Church to our aid do we commend ourselves and our individual lives to Christ our God. We do not commend ourselves alone to God, but we address God as one Body in Christ.

THE ANTIPHONS AND THE *MONOGENES*

Antiphons refer to something sung alternately by two choirs. From the very beginning, Christians have sung the praises of Christ antiphonally. Interesting evidence of this has been left to us by the official representative of Emperor Trajan in Asia Minor, the prominent lawyer and administrator Pliny the Younger (61-113). In an official correspondence with Trajan, Pliny asks the Emperor about the "Christian problem," stating that "the sum total of their guilt or error amounts to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god."[106]

The Antiphons of the Divine Liturgy mainly consist of the prophecies of the Old Testament foretelling the coming of the Son of God, like the prophet Baruch who proclaimed: "Our God has appeared upon earth and dwelt among us."[107] These are almost the same words as found in the prologue of the Gospel of John: "And the Word became

[106]***The Letters of the Younger Pliny*, Book 10, letter 96. Translation by Betty Radice (New York:Penguin Books, 1969), 294.**

[107]**Baruch 3:38.**

flesh and dwelt among us."[108] The Psalmist foresaw the Incarnation when he declared that the Lord "is clothed in majesty,"[109] that is, clothed in our humanity. But after He appeared whose coming had been foretold, He no longer used veiled prophecies.

The Antiphons represent the first stage of Christ's coming, when, although present throughout the earth, He was not generally known. At this time He revealed Himself to us in prophetic writings. The time before John the Baptist is represented in the Liturgy by these chants taken from the prophetic writings; for at this point the eucharistic offerings, which are figures of Christ, are not shown to the Faithful, but are kept at one side and remain covered.

The priest prays for the worshiping people and for the holy house, that God may pour forth upon them the riches of His tender mercy. He concludes by giving the reason for his entreaties:

"Because to You belong all glory, honor and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages."

We glorify Him because He is a God rich in compassion and tender mercy, and in granting us our petitions of mercy and compassion He is only adding to His own glory. This glorification belongs only to Him because He is the source of mercy and compassion. As David says, "Not to us, O Lord, but to Your name give glory."[110]

The priest says the above in a very loud voice, that all may hear. Since it is a conclusion and a doxology, he wishes to bring all the Faithful to share in his hymn of praise, that God may be worshiped by all.

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[108] John 1:14.

[109] Psalm 92:1.

[110] Psalm 115:1.

Then the congregation unites itself to the priest by replying, “Amen.” By this acclamation the people make their own the prayers just said. There is a particularly charming description of the ancient Christian Liturgy which was written by Saint Justin Martyr (100-165). After describing the consecration of the gifts, Justin writes: “At the end of these prayers and thanksgiving, all present express their approval by saying, `Amen.’ This Hebrew word, `Amen,’ means, `So be it.’”[111] He mentions this seemingly small detail because, in the pagan rites of the day, active participation of the non-ordained was rare. Justin takes pride in the fact that Christianity doesn’t practice such elitism, but that all illuminated through baptism are expected to contribute to the celebration of the holy Mystery.

The refrains of the Antiphons sung today are addressed to Jesus Christ as Savior. The first Antiphon implores Christ to save us through the intercessions of the Mother of God, and the second implores Christ to save us because He is the resurrected Lord. In the ancient Church, a designated Psalm was sung at this point along with the refrains.

The First Antiphon sung by the people is:

“Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.” (*Three times*)

After the First Antiphon, the priest (or deacon) intones the Little Litany. Then the priest says the prayer of the Second Antiphon, praying to God for the whole body of the Church, and particularly for those who love the beauty of the holy house and have desired to contribute in every possible way to its splendor. He asks that they in their turn may be glorified by God. The priest gives a fitting reason: “For Yours is the dominion, and Yours the kingdom and the power and the glory.” Glory is the property of kings, but God is the ultimate King and has all power and dominion.

Then the refrain of the Second Antiphon is chanted:[112]

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[111]Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 65.

[112]Historically, the designated Psalm is sung with the refrain; or the typical Psalm may be sung instead.

"Save us, O Son of God (who art risen from the dead)[113], save us who sing to You, alleluia." (*Three times*)

At the conclusion of the Second Antiphon, the hymn, "Only-begotten Son" ("*Monogenes*"), is chanted:

"O Only-begotten Son and Word of God, though immortal, for our salvation you deigned to be incarnate of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary; without change becoming human, and was crucified, O Christ our God, trampling death by death; being one of the Holy Trinity, glorified together with the Father and the Holy Spirit: Save us."

This hymn emphasizes the triumph of the Redeemer who, without change, became human and was crucified, trampling down death by death. Emperor Justinian I is believed to have composed this hymn around 528 when he entertained Patriarch Severus of Antioch in Constantinople. It was adopted into the Liturgy the same year, though not without some reservations in certain quarters due to its connection with Justinian. The Non-Chalcedonian churches in Syria and Egypt, for example, never adopted it.

The *Monogenes* was originally an entrance hymn which was moved to its present position in the Liturgy around the ninth century. It is strongly anti-Nestorian,[114] proclaiming that Mary is the Mother of God (Theotokos) and stressing that Christ is consubstantial with both the Father and the Holy Spirit. It also rebuts the Monophysite teaching of Eutyches, an archimandrite[115] of Constantinople who believed that Christ's divine and human natures

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[113]The part in parentheses is only sung on Sundays.

[114]Nestorianism is a heresy which claims that Mary was the mother only of Christ's human nature and which consequently banned the term "Theotokos," Mother of God. Having posited a radical separation of Christ's humanity from His divinity, Nestorianism was condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431.

[115]An *archimandrite* is a high-ranking celibate priest who is the head of a monastery.

blended at the Incarnation and became a third, compound nature. Orthodoxy, however, teaches that Christ can only be simultaneously true God and true man if His divine and His human natures remained unchanged after the Incarnation, not changed into a third compound nature. Thus the hymn proclaims that Christ "without becoming human," rejecting the heresy of Eutyches.

Up to this point in the Liturgy, we have experienced Christ in the prophecies of the Old Testament and in His hidden early years. The *Monogenes* here signals a change by openly proclaiming Jesus Christ as He really is, true God and true man. Symbolically, the hymn is the counterpart of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, when the heavens opened up and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove while the voice of the Father declared Him to be His "beloved Son."[116]

The priest (or deacon) then intones another Litany and recites the prayer of the Third Antiphon, asking that each may receive from God that which he privately requests according to God's will. The priest then asks on behalf of all that the Lord may grant "the knowledge of Your truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting." The Third Antiphon consists of the designated Psalm with the Troparion[117] and is sung in a triumphal tone.[118]

THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

The Little Entrance was formerly a part of the entrance of the clergy and the people into the church, and not just a procession within the church as it is today. This is why the priest blesses the "entrance of [God's] holy people" even though the people are already in the Church:

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[116] **Matthew 3:16-17.**

[117] **Or the Troparion of the Resurrection alone.**

[118] **In some traditions, as in the Russian church, the Beatitudes are sung.**



"Blessed is the entrance of Your holy people always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

The Gospel book is carried surrounded by a procession of acolytes bearing candles. The deacon takes the Gospel and exits the sanctuary from the northern door of the Iconostasis, proceeding to the Royal Doors. The entrance of the Gospel signifies the entrance of the Son of God into this world. Therefore we should rejoice and worship during the entrance of the Gospel even as the angels did on beholding the birth of the Son of God. As the Apostle says, "When He [the Father] brings the first-born into the world, He says: `Let all God's angels worship him.'"[119]

THE PRAYER OF THE ENTRANCE

The priest and the rest of the procession then stand immediately in front of the Royal Doors, waiting for the chant to end. The priest prays that God will make this entrance into the sanctuary an entrance accompanied by holy angels glorifying His goodness. God should be worshiped by both humanity and the angels, for it is right that all honor, glory and praise should be rendered to the Lord of all by those who know how to praise and worship Him.

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[119]Hebrews 1:6.

The clergy then enter the sanctuary through the Royal Doors while the designated Troparion and the Kontakion[120] are sung:

"Come let us worship and fall down before Him. Save us, O Son of God . . ."[121]

The priest then sets the Gospel book on the Holy Table. Actually, the Gospel is not so much "set" on the Holy Table as it is enthroned, for the Gospel book represents Christ, the Word of God. After the Word is enthroned, the clergy, acolytes and everyone else at the Liturgy sing the Trisagion, just as the heavenly hosts sing the glory of God around the throne of the Most High in heaven.

THE TRISAGION HYMN

The Trisagion (literally, "thrice holy") hymn is found in all Eastern Liturgies, and is said to come to us from the angels. According to legend, a severe earthquake shook the capitol of the Empire while Saint Proclus, patriarch of Constantinople (434-446), was leading the people in prayer. It is said that a young boy was lifted into the air and heard the angels singing, "Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us." The boy told the people to sing this hymn, and when they did, the earthquake ceased.

While scholars today dismiss the account (for one thing, there is no record of an earthquake in Constantinople during the patriarchate of Proclus), nevertheless it cannot be disputed that the Trisagion comes from the angels. The hymn is in part inspired by the vision granted to Isaiah of the angels gathered around the throne of God

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[120]A type of liturgical hymn popularized by Saint Romanus the Melodist (sixth century) which gives an abbreviated meaning of the feast of a given day. It is sung after the sixth ode of the Canon in the Liturgy.

[121]Cf. Psalm 94:6.

singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.”[122] The apostle John was granted the same angelic vision while on the isle of Patmos: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”[123] The title “Mighty One” is probably from Psalm 45:3, while “Immortal One” may have been inspired by Psalms 102:26-27 and 90:2-4.[124] The Trisagion was first introduced into the Liturgy in Constantinople between 430 and 450, and was subsequently sung by the Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon (451).

The Trisagion is always solemnly chanted before the reading of the Epistle. One of the reasons the Church included the Trisagion into the Liturgy was to show that angels and mortals form one Church, a single choir. Because of the coming of Christ, there is now a bridge between heaven and earth and we can now join the angles in giving perfect glory to God. In the Orthodox tradition, the hymn is essentially Trinitarian:[125]

“Holy God,” referring to the Father.

“Holy Mighty One,” that is, the Son Who has bound the devil and made him powerless through the cross, trampling down death by death.

“Holy Immortal One,” the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, through whom all Creation receives life.

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[122]Isaiah 6:3.

[123]Revelation 4:8.

[124]Also, the apostle Paul wrote that the Lord is “King eternal, immortal (*aphtharton*)” (1 Timothy 1:17), and He “alone is immortal (*athanasian*)” (1 Timothy 6:16).

[125]The Jacobite Patriarch Peter the Fuller (468/70-488) early on in his episcopate added the phrase, “who was crucified for us”, after, “Immortal One.” This made the Trisagion a strictly christological hymn in the Non-Chalcedonian churches. The purpose of the addition was to stress that it is perfectly proper to say that God died for us.

Because the Trisagion is considered to be a reference to the all-holy Trinity, the Faithful usually make the sign of the cross while it is sung. After the Trisagion, the priest, turning towards the bishop's throne behind the Holy Table, then says:

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."[126]

This is what was said as the Lord made His entrance into Jerusalem on a colt during Holy Week, fulfilling the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 that "your king," the Messianic King of Israel, would come riding on a donkey. It was this Messianic expectation which led crowds to gather around the road leading into the city to greet Jesus, shouting, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" This is from Psalm 118:26, a psalm especially loaded with prophetic allusions to the Messiah.

The Talmud contains a fascinating homily on the prophecy that the Messiah would come on a colt: "Rabbi Alexandri said, `Rabbi Y'hoshua set two verses against each other: It is written, "And behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13), while elsewhere it is written, "See, your king comes to you,...humbly riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). [He resolved the paradox by saying that] if they deserve it [he will come] with the clouds of heaven, but if not, lowly and riding on an ass.'"[127]

The rabbis were combining Christ's two entrances into the world: His first in humility, riding on an ass, and His second in power and glory. The New Testament, on the other hand, distinguishes Christ's two comings into the world. Thus in the Little Entrance, Christ's first entrance into the world is signified by the Gospel reading which tells us of His Incarnation two thousand years ago. This is also signified by the singing of, "Blessed is he who

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[126]Matthew 21:9.

[127]Sanhedrin 98a. Cited by David Stern in *The Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD:Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 62.

comes in the name of the Lord," which recalls Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem during Holy Week. The second and glorious entrance into the world as King of kings and Lord of lords is signified by Christ's enthronement on the Holy Table, after which the priest says:

"Blessed are You, seated above the Cherubim on the throne of the glory of Your kingdom: always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages."

THE READINGS

The Scripture readings are not only for instructional purposes; they also purify and prepare us for the holy eucharistic Mystery. Since they are divinely inspired, the lessons sanctify those who read and those who hear them: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near."[128] The readings proclaim the goodness of God and His love for humanity as well as reveal His justice. They enkindle in us a powerful love for the God who loved us so much that He gave us His only-begotten Son. Encountering this divine love arouses in us a great zeal for the observance of the divine commandments. All this makes us fit for the reception and preservation of the eucharistic Mystery, which is the primary aim of the Liturgy.

Because of the particular biblical selections and the order in which they occur during the liturgical year, the readings fittingly present the coming of Christ and His work. The practice of having Scripture readings during the Liturgy followed by a homily reaches back to the Old Testament Church, particularly the synagogue. In fact, Jesus started His public ministry in a synagogue by reading a prophecy from Isaiah, after which He declared, "Today this

[128] **Revelation 1:3.**

scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."[129] The apostle Paul preached the Gospel in synagogues when invited to give the homily after the Scripture reading.[130]

In the mid-second century, Justin Martyr relates that the Christians would, "On the day which is called Sunday, have a common assembly of all who live in the cities or in the outlying districts, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, as long as there is time. Then, when the reader has finished, the president of the assembly verbally admonishes and invites all to imitate such examples of virtue."[131] As the liturgical calendar evolved, passages of Scripture of roughly uniform length were assigned to the various feast days.

THE EPISTLE

The first reading is chanted before the reading of the Holy Gospel. It is either a passage from the Epistles or the Acts of the Apostles bearing on Sunday's theme. The Book of Revelation, though accepted as canonical by the Orthodox Church, is not a part of the readings. This is because millenarian sects in the early Church misused the book and cast a shadow over its orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the Church slowly accepted the Book of Revelation as divinely inspired and uses many of its images of heavenly worship in the Divine Liturgy, though it never changed its lectionary in order to include readings from it.

The Reader first intones the Prokeimenon, the designated verses from the Psalms concerning the coming of Christ. *Prokeimenon* is a Greek word meaning, "that which is set forth," or "what precedes." In the early Church, the chanting of a psalm from the Bible preceded the readings from the New Testament, thus the singing of the

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[129]Luke 4:21.

[130]E.g., Acts 13:15.

[131]Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 67.

psalm was called the "Prokeimenon." In the *Apostolic Constitutions* written during the fourth century, it is said that after the two readings from the Old Testament had concluded, "some other person should sing the hymns of David and the people should join in at the conclusion of the verses."[132] Some have suggested that this singing of the psalms at the conclusion of a Scripture reading may be derived from the practice of singing a psalm in the synagogue when the scrolls were put away.

After the designated reading from the Epistle, the priest then says:

"Peace be with you, the reader."

Then the people shout thrice:

"Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."[133]

THE HOLY GOSPEL

The word "Gospel" derives from the Greek word *evangelion* and means "good news." In the four Gospels, God no longer speaks to us through prophetic riddles, but directly in the person of His Son. As Paul wrote, "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken

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[132]*The Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 2, 57.

[133]In Hebrew *al* means, "He comes, He appears;" *el* means, "God;" and *ouia* means, "praise and sing hymns" to the living God. The Hebrew word is directly transliterated in only one place in the New Testament, in Revelation 19:1-6 where the context is the "marriage supper of the Lamb." The eucharistic overtones cannot be missed.

to us by His Son."[134] All who hear the Good News and spiritually receive the Son, believing in His name, receive the power to become sons and daughters of God.[135]

In the prayer before the Gospel reading, the priest asks that the pure light of divine knowledge may shine in the people's hearts so that they may understand the message. The people must be made ready. Up to now the Lord has only spoken in a veiled manner, just as on Mount Sinai where God only spoke through a bright cloud.[136] Now the God of Sinai is about to reveal Himself in the Person of the Incarnate Word and speak to us directly. Therefore the priest exclaims:

"Wisdom! Attend! Let us hear the holy Gospel. Peace be to all."

The priest blesses the people, who respond:

"And to your spirit."

The priest then announces the Gospel reading:

"The reading from the Holy Gospel according to Saint (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John)."

Then the people cry out:

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[134] **Hebrews 1:1-2.**

[135] **John 1:12.**

[136] **"The Lord said to Moses, `I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you'" (Exodus 19:9).**

"Glory to You, O Lord, glory to You."

After He who was foretold appeared, the words of the prophets were fulfilled. Therefore, after the Gospel reading, prophetic texts cease to be used in the Liturgy. From now on we sing texts from the New Testament. We now glorify Christ for coming to dwell among us, for the sufferings He endured and the works He accomplished on earth. Because of all that Christ did and suffered, the Church has kept a perpetual festival for the past two thousand years. It is this Good News of Jesus Christ which the Church has been ordained to herald.

THE HOMILY

Following the readings, it is customary for the priest to proclaim the Gospel in a homily. Preaching is an inseparable part of the Liturgy of the Catechumens and therefore can never be dispensed with. Based firmly on the readings for the day, the homily should meet the needs and the circumstances of the congregation.

In the early Church, it was a general belief that preaching was a charismatic gift proper to the bishop. The special authority of the bishop to preach the Gospel was expressed by the custom of the bishop preaching from his *cathedra* (Greek for "seat"),[137] his seat of authority which was modeled on that of "Moses' Cathedra" mentioned

[137] **While John Chrysostom is known to have preached from the ambo, this was simply a concession to practical considerations. The practice of the bishop preaching from his *cathedra* was normative in both the East and West in the early Church. An exception, though, would be the custom in Egypt where the bishop held the Gospel book while preaching as a sign of his authority.**

by Jesus.[138] According to the Midrash Rabbah, the Israelites "made for [Moses] a *cathedra* like that of the advocates, in which one sits and yet seems to be standing."[139]

"Moses' Seat" was to be occupied by someone with authority to safeguard the word of God, the *Torah* which had been given to Moses. Sitting on Moses' Seat symbolized the succession of authority, starting with Moses, to officially expound the Torah to the people of Israel. This authority was in many ways absolute, so that the one sitting on it exercised the power of a judge, officially interpreting the Torah even in civil matters.[140] The responsibility to preside over the official interpretation of the word of God was represented in the synagogue by a special seat occupied by the rabbi and called either Moses' Seat or the Throne of the Torah. This seat was located in the center of the synagogue on a raised platform called a *bema*. Thus the practice of bishops preaching from their *cathedra's* as a sign of their authority is derived from the Old Testament Church. In fact, the word "cathedral" comes from this Greek word *cathedra*: the cathedral is the church where the bishop has his *cathedra*.

That this preaching authority of the bishop was taken quite seriously in the early Church can be gleaned from the following examples: During the third century, a brilliant theologian named Origen, who was not a bishop, thoroughly scandalized the church in Caesarea by preaching a homily at the invitation of the local bishop. The same reaction greeted Augustine of Hippo when he preached a homily in North Africa before being elevated to the episcopate. After the condemnation of Arius, the heretical priest from Alexandria condemned at the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (325), even priests had been forbidden to preach in North Africa, a situation which prevailed until the beginning of the fifth century.

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[138]Matthew 23:2-3.

[139]Exodus Rabbah, 43:4. Cited by David Stern in *The Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 67.

[140]Cf. Deuteronomy 17:8-13.

The Orthodox Church possesses in its patristic literature (i.e., the writings of the Church Fathers) an abundant and priceless treasure-trove of spirituality which can be preached from the pulpit, an inheritance which must be studied by each new generation. This is why Orthodox homiletics has traditionally been characterized by variety and richness. In doing proper preaching, priests not only follow Church "standards," but become bearers of the genuine Orthodox Tradition.

THE PRAYERS FOR THE CATECHUMENS

What prayer could be more fitting after the preaching of the Gospel than a prayer for those who are learning the Gospel, who are preparing themselves to "put on Christ" in baptism? These unbaptized persons the Church calls *catechumens*. Since we are about to proceed to the Eucharistic sacrifice, at which the uninitiated have no right to be present, the priest and the deacon dismiss the catechumens from the congregation. In the early Church, the practice was for the catechumens to leave and then receive instruction. First, however, the priest would pray for them, that their initiation would be completed by the grace of Baptism at the proper time.

The main reason for the dismissal of the catechumens was the practice in the early Church of concealing sacred rites and beliefs from outsiders. This was to protect what was sacred from sacrilege and other forms of profanation. Because the catechumens were still outside the Church, though already "believers," they were considered untried and not yet made firm in the Faith. The Church was not yet willing to permit them to be present when the awesome Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ was celebrated.

This practice was a part of what liturgists call the *disciplina arcani,* the practice of concealing the sacred. Today, for example, before the recitation of the Creed, the deacon cries out, "The doors! The doors!", a relic of this *disciplina arcani*. The doors of the church would be guarded so that non-Christians, those "outside" the Church, would literally remain outside the church during the Eucharist. In the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions*, the

rubrics state that “deacons should also stand at the doors of the men and subdeacons at the doors of the women, so that no one goes out and no door is opened, even for any of the Faithful, during the sacrifice.”[141]

After the sixth century, there were few catechumens left in the Eastern Empire, though Saint Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century still mentions the dismissal of catechumens and others who couldn’t receive Communion. But as the centuries went on, the need for a formal dismissal dwindled and the rubrics came to be fulfilled in a perfunctory manner. Today the prayers for the catechumens are usually said silently by the priest, including the call to exit the Church.

The tendency today is to discard this part of the Liturgy as a relic which no longer serves a useful purpose. However, as the late Alexander Schmemann has pointed out, the issue is not one of abandoning something obsolete in order to “tidy” up the Liturgy, updating it to make it more relevant to the contemporary world. The issue is whether the prayers for the catechumens express an essential truth of Christianity. Father Schmemann had no doubt that these prayers did, and in fact served an important purpose today by reminding us of the Church’s mission to our contemporary neo-pagan world:

“Is it accidental that in the past the Church attached such a significance to [the prayers] that the entire first part of the eucharistic gathering came to be called the `liturgy of the catechumens’?...Historically, of course, the prayers for the catechumens were introduced at a time when the Church not only contained the institution of the catechumenate but in actuality considered herself directed toward the world with the aim of converting it to Christ, when she considered the world as an object of mission. Then the historical setting changed, and it seemed that the world had become Christian. But do we not live again today in a world that has either turned away from Christianity or has never even heard of Christ? Is not *mission* again in the center of church consciousness? And is it not a sin against this basic calling when the Church, the ecclesial community, locks herself in her `inner’ life and

[141]***The Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 8, 11. The rubric comes immediately after the Holy Kiss and before the Offertory.**

considers herself called only `to attend to the spiritual needs' of her members and thus for all intents and purposes denies that mission is a basic ministry and task of the Church in `this world'?"[142]

IV. THE LITURGY OF THE FAITHFUL

THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

After the Prayer for the Catechumens, the celebrant inaudibly says another prayer in which he thanks God that he has been found worthy to stand before the heavenly throne on behalf of the people of God. Then the priest prays that he may always be held worthy to perform this act with a clear conscience, without condemnation and without offense. Again, the ultimate goal of the prayer is God's glory. Therefore, the priest says aloud:

"Help us, save us, and have mercy on us and keep us, O God by Your grace. Wisdom: That guarded always by Your might we may ascribe glory to You, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages."

The people of God then rise and say in unison:

"Amen."

THE GREAT ENTRANCE

[142] Alexander Schmemann, *The Eucharist* (Crestwood:St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 86-87. Emphasis in the original.

The Great Entrance is essentially the transporting of the consecrated gifts from the Prothesis to the Holy Table. The act of presenting the gifts to be consecrated has always been characteristic of the Christian Liturgy. Justin Martyr notes it in his brief description of the Liturgy in the second century: “At the conclusion of the prayers we greet one another with a kiss. *Then, bread and a chalice containing wine mixed with water are presented to the one presiding over the brethren*. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and he recites lengthy prayers of thanksgiving to God in the name of those to whom He granted such favors.”[143]

The common opinion is that originally the presentation of the gifts to be consecrated was done by the Faithful, and that later on the clergy assumed this task as the Liturgy became more clericalized. Liturgical scholars like Josef Jungmann have noted that such processions of the Faithful to present the gifts to be offered “flourished in the Occident for over a thousand years.”[144]

While this may have been true for the West, the East never knew such an “offertory of the Faithful.” According to a liturgist who has studied the issue in-depth, “the Great Entrance is simply a development of the original transfer of gifts by the deacons; there is no convincing evidence that there was ever an offertory procession of the faithful in the East...It would seem, then, that contemporary Byzantine practice is a fairly accurate reflection of what has always been the Oriental custom regarding the offerings of the faithful: the people bring to the priest their prosphora with a list of the living and dead for whom they wish him to pray, whenever they happen to arrive in church. These gifts remain in the skeuophylakion or prothesis until after the Liturgy of the Word, when they are then transferred to the altar in the Great Entrance.”[145]

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[143]Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 65. Emphasis added.

[144]Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy*, 117.

[145]Robert Taft, *The Great Entrance* (Rome:Pontifical Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1978), 11, 34.

The manner in which the gifts are presented has today become one of the climactic moments of the Liturgy. The gifts are taken out the north door of the Iconostasis with candles, incense, icons, liturgical fans and the cross, and there is a long procession through the Church which ends in front of the Royal Doors. The development of the Great Entrance into its present grandeur started roughly around the fifth century and reached its present form by the fourteenth.

The chant used during the Great Entrance is called either the Cherubic Hymn or the Cherubicon:

"We who mystically represent the Cherubim, and sing to the life-giving Trinity the thrice-holy hymn, let us now lay aside all earthly care, that we may receive the King of all, who comes invisibly borne up by the angelic hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."

This hymn was certainly in existence before it was formally introduced into the Liturgy in 574 by Emperor Justin II. Though he doesn't give the texts, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite around the year 500 mentions that hymns were sung during the Great Entrance:

"The hierarch, having said a sacred prayer at the divine altar, begins the censing there and then makes the round of the entire sacred place. Returning to the divine altar, he begins the sacred singing of the psalms and the entire assembly joins him in this....Some of the deacons stand on guard in the sacred place to ensure that the doors are kept closed. Others perform tasks appropriate to their order. The chosen deacons, along with the priests, put on the divine altar the sacred bread and the cup of blessing. And all this is preceded by the singing by the entire gathering of the hymn of universal faith (i.e., the Creed, which was introduced in the late fifth century). Then the divine hierarch says a sacred prayer and bids holy peace to all. All the others exchange the ritual kiss and the mystical reading of the sacred volumes is concluded (i.e., the diptychs, or "folding boards," which listed the names of those either living or dead who are commemorated during the Liturgy)."[146]

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[146] **Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, chapter 3.**

It is quite possible that one of these hymns could have been an early version of the Cherubic Hymn. Only a few decades later, Patriarch Eutychius (552-565, 577-582) in his *Sermon on the Pascha and the Holy Eucharist* objected to the inclusion of a “psalmic chant” where “the people say that they bear in the king of glory and refer in this way to the things being brought up, even though they have not been consecrated by the high-priestly invocation.” Many commentators on the Divine Liturgy believe this is a reference to the existence of the Cherubic Hymn just prior to 574.

Other liturgists, however, believe that Eutychius was probably not referring to the Cherubic Hymn. For one thing, the “king of glory” would be a misquotation of the phrase “king of all;” and it seems unlikely that the patriarch would garble the very phrase which he found objectionable and which he heard sung whenever he celebrated the Liturgy. Moreover, its characterization as a “psalmic chant” has lead many to believe that Eutychius was talking about one of the biblical psalms being used at an inappropriate place during the Liturgy. Liturgical scholars like Robert Taft suggest the psalm was Psalm 23 (LXX) where, in its Septuagint reading, the phrase, “the king of glory”, occurs several times in verses 7-10: “Lift up your gates, ye princes, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your gates, ye princes; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the king of glory.” It may be that our present Cherubic Hymn was introduced to replace the singing of this psalm during the Great Entrance.

Many meanings have been ascribed to the Cherubic Hymn. Some commentators simply say that it refers to the entrance of Christ escorted by the heavenly hosts. Others interpret the entrance in a paschal context, as the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem, or as Christ being led to His Passion and burial. Sometimes it is seen as His descent into Hades, or His entrance into His kingdom. The hymn itself, though, is quite simple and straightforward: Let us set aside all the cares of life, that we may receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts.

At the beginning of the Cherubic Hymn, the *antimension*, a cloth containing holy relics, is unfolded by the priest and laid on the Holy Table. This practice seems to be an echo from the ancient Church, which would frequently celebrate the Liturgy on the graves of the martyrs. Originally, the antimension was used in place of the holy table, as the word "antimension" (literally, "in place of a table") means. It is now used, however, in every Divine Liturgy whether there is a consecrated altar or not.

The bishop gives the antimension to the priest as a way of delegating his authority to the priest. In the ancient Church, when there would be only one congregation celebrating the Eucharist in a city, the bishop was the one who celebrated the Mystery and the presbyters would simply assist him. But as the number of Christians grew, it became necessary for bishops to delegate their authority to the presbyters in order to allow several Liturgies to be celebrated in different locations on Sunday. This can be seen as early as the year 110, when Saint Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, wrote to the church at Smyrna, "Let no one do any of the things appertaining to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, *or by one whom he appoints*."[147] The antimension denotes this delegation of authority to the priest, as a sort of "license" to celebrate the Eucharist in the bishop's diocese. The laying out of this "authority" to celebrate the Eucharist signals the end of the Synaxis and the actual beginning of the Liturgy of the Faithful.

THE PRAYER OF THE CHERUBIC HYMN

While the Cherubic Hymn is being sung, the priest in a low voice says the prayer of the Cherubic Hymn. This prayer is addressed to the Son, the King of Glory who, in His love for humanity, became man without change or alteration. While the prayer is addressed to Christ, by the end glory is given not only to the Son, but also to the eternal Father and to the all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit.

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[147] **Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 8:1. Emphasis added.**

This is the only prayer in which the celebrant speaks of himself as a person clothed with the grace of the priesthood. Christ our High Priest has entrusted to the priests of the Church the celebration of the unbloody Liturgy. Being, however, bound by worldly desires and pleasures, the priest considers himself sinful and unworthy to minister to the King of Glory; for to serve Christ is great and awesome even for the heavenly powers. Consequently, he asks God to look favorably upon him, a sinful and unprofitable servant, and to cleanse him from an evil conscience. Then the priest asks God to enable him, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to celebrate the Mystery of the holy and pure Body and Blood of Christ.

In this prayer it is declared that Christ, as man, is the One who offers, and as God, is the One who receives the offering. The Second Person of the Trinity receives and is distributed. This part of the prayer stirred up a big controversy in the twelfth century when a mere deacon declared it to be heretical,[148] stating that Christ is only the offerer and that only the Father and the Spirit receive the offering. This issue was settled on January 26, 1156 at a synod in Constantinople called by Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges, which reaffirmed the orthodoxy of the prayer.

After the prayer of the Cherubic Hymn, the priest and the deacon recite the Cherubic Hymn again three times and then cense the Holy Table, the icons, and the people. Present-day rubrics instruct the priest to recite Psalm 51 in a low voice during the censing, a practice probably started during the Middle Ages. The psalm, however, fits the penitential tone at this solemn point of the Liturgy. No one ought to enter into the celebration of the awe-inspiring eucharistic Mystery without first repenting of his sins. Thus, after reciting the 51st Psalm, two penitential troparia are said. Describing himself as a prodigal son and a tax-collector, the celebrant asks the Father in the first prayer, and then Christ in the second, to accept his repentance.

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[148]The controversy involved the learned deacon Soterichus Panteugenes, deacons Michael of Thessalonica and Nicephorus Basilaces (both of whom served in the Hagia Sophia and taught theology at the patriarchal school), and the metropolitan of Dyrrachim, Eustathius, who was at the time Patriarch-elect of Antioch.

As the priest and the deacon go to the Prothesis, the priest lifts the aer from the gifts, places it on the deacon's shoulders and gives him the Diskos, saying:

"Lift up your hands to the holy places, and bless the Lord."[149]

The priest then takes up the Chalice, saying:

"God has gone up with a shout; the Lord with the sound of the trumpet."[150]

THE PROCESSION

The deacon then takes the Diskos while the priest takes the Chalice, and reverently holding them at head-level, they carry them in a slow and solemn procession through the nave of the church. They go surrounded by acolytes with candles, icons, incense, liturgical fans (which are in the likeness of the Seraphim), and the cross, until they reach the Royal Doors in front of the Iconostasis. The procession is normally accompanied by the singing of the Cherubic Hymn. The procession of the holy gifts signifies Christ proceeding to the mystical sacrifice, recalling Palm Sunday when the Lord rode into the Holy City on a donkey escorted by a jubilant crowd. In the same vein, it can also signify Jesus' final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, again, where He was to be sacrificed.

During the Great Entrance, the Faithful must bow their heads before the priest and entreat Christ to remember them in His kingdom. The priest (or deacon) says in a loud voice:

"May the Lord God remember all of you in His kingdom, always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages."

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[149]Psalm 134:2.

[150]Psalm 47:5.

Then the priest prays for the bishop, the president of the country, and the living who have offered the oblation. After recalling the names of those who have departed this life, the priest then enters the sanctuary through the Royal Doors and places the holy gifts upon the Holy Table. The priest then quietly mentions the burial of Christ. He describes how Joseph of Arimathea took down the body from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen -- anointing it with spices and ointment -- and then, with Nicodemus, how Joseph placed the body of the Lord in a new tomb hewn out of a rock. The altar is an image of the holy tomb in which the pure body of Jesus was placed. Thus the placing of the gifts on the Holy Table after the Great Entrance is seen by many as a picture of the burial of Christ.

At this point the priest chants a solemn hymn:

"O Christ, You were in the grave with Your Body, but as God You were in Hades with Your soul; in Paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit, filling all things, O Incomprehensible One."

The priest takes the covers from the Diskos and the Chalice and places them on the Holy Table, on the corners of the antimension. He then censes the aer, placing it over the Diskos and the Chalice. He censes them three times, saying quietly the last verse of Psalm 51:

"Then they will offer bulls on Your altar." (*Three times*)

Meanwhile the people complete the singing of the Cherubic Hymn.

THE LITANY OF THE PROTHESIS

The priest (or deacon) asks the congregation to pray for the gifts which are about to be offered. Then he adds other intentions for which we must pray. He asks, for example, that the whole day may be holy, perfect, peaceful, and

sinless, and that we may have as our defender a faithful angel of peace. Everyone has a guardian angel from birth,[151] but we now request that he may be active and may fulfil his task, that he may protect us and lead us in the right path. The priest also calls upon us to beg for the forgiveness of our sins, and for the bestowal of all that is good and useful to our souls. The priest prays for the peace of the whole world; and that we may pass the rest of our lives in peace and repentance, so that our end may be such as befits a Christian. He concludes by asking us to commend ourselves and each other and our whole lives to Christ our God.

THE PRAYER BEFORE THE OFFERING (PROSKOMIDE)

The priest now asks God to accept the sacrifice of praise from those who call on Him with their whole heart. He implores God to enable him to bring before the divine Majesty gifts and spiritual sacrifices for his sins and those of the people. The priest prays for divine favor, that the sacrifice may be pleasing, and that the Holy Spirit may rest on him, the people, and the gifts presented.

When he comes to the final section of his private prayer, the priest raises his voice and recites the doxology. Then he approaches the Royal Doors and says:

“Peace be to all.”

As the Faithful are commanded by the Scriptures to pray for one another, the congregation returns the blessing to the priest, saying:

“And with your spirit.”

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[151]Cf. Matthew 18:10.

Since, as the apostle John says, brotherly love is the only valid proof that we truly love God,[152] the priest adds:

"Let us love one another..."

Love is the core of our Christian Faith, and so our love for each other leads us naturally to unity and to the confession of our common Faith. So the priests adds:

"...that with one mind we may confess..."

Here the Faithful complete the sentence for the priest by confessing the Holy Trinity:

"...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the Trinity, one in essence and undivided."

Then the priest kisses the holy gifts, citing Psalm 18:2:

"I love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer."

THE HOLY KISS

The celebrants in the sanctuary go through the gestures of embracing and kissing one another while the congregation sings, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the Trinity, one in essence and undivided." The members of the congregation should exchange a kiss of peace, a handshake, or some other expression of love and unity. The people

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[152] 1 John 4:20-21.

should say to one another, "Christ is in our midst;" to which the response is, "He is and ever shall be." The Holy Kiss has been customary since apostolic times.[153] Originally it was an actual kiss, but was later modified into an embrace. It has been modified in all Christian rites, both in the East and in the West.

Regardless of the specific gesture, the purpose of the Holy Kiss is to signify our personal reconciliation with each other as a result of the resurrection of Christ. Jesus Himself stressed the importance of first reconciling with each other before making an offering to God: "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."[154] This is why the Holy Kiss precedes the Anaphora, the prayer in which we offer the gifts to God on the altar.

The Apostle wrote, "For when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son; much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by His life."[155] As a result of "Christ reconciling the world to Himself,"[156] we are now one in Christ, being "all baptized into one body."[157] This unity will be especially manifest when we begin to participate in the Eucharist itself. "For," Paul says, "we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."[158]

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[153]Cf. Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; and 1 Peter 5:14.

[154]Matthew 5:23-24.

[155]Romans 5:10.

[156]2 Corinthians 5:19.

[157]1 Corinthians 12:13.

[158]1 Corinthians 10:17.

THE CREED

After the Holy Kiss, the deacon exclaims:

“The Doors! The Doors! Wisdom. Be attentive.”

As we’ve already discussed when we examined the dismissal of the catechumens, originally the deacons guarded the doors of the church to prevent the entrance of unbelievers. Only baptized Christians are to participate in the eucharistic Mystery. Today, the command to guard the doors is often taken metaphorically to mean guarding the entrance to our hearts, to “watch” and be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man, as in the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins.[159] While the context of the parable is Christ’s Second Coming at the consummation of the world, it can also be interpreted as the Lord’s coming to us in the Eucharist.

The cry, “The doors! The doors! Wisdom! Be attentive!”, can also be interpreted within the context of the recitation of the Creed. Nicholas Cabasilas in the fourteenth century wrote in his commentary on the Divine Liturgy:

“Now the priest commands the congregation to proclaim that which they have learned and which they believe concerning God;...This wisdom (i.e., the Creed) is not known to the world, that is, the worldly wise, who can conceive of nothing greater or higher than the knowledge of material things, and cannot believe in the existence of a higher wisdom. It is in this wisdom that the priest asks us to open all the doors -- that is, our mouths and ears.

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[159] **Matthew 25:1-13.**

Open the doors in this wisdom...proclaiming and listening to these high teachings constantly; not inattentively but eagerly, devoting all your minds to it."[160]

After the cry, "The doors! The doors!", the people begin reciting the Creed composed at the Council of Nicaea (325) and the one at Constantinople (381):

"I BELIEVE in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became human; who was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; who rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; and who is coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead; and his kingdom will have no end; and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets; in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen."

Early creeds were used at baptisms as a profession of Faith for converts. But later on, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was made the litmus test of Orthodoxy for everyone, including those already in the Church. With the rising tide of heresies in the early Church, the Creed of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils became a formula summarizing the essential articles of the Faith and revealing all private inventions as the heresies they really are.

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[160]Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, 26. Translation by J.M. Hussey and P.A. McNulty (London:SPCK, 1960), 67.

There were also, however, other factors which led the Church to insert the Creed into the Liturgy. It was originally the Non-Chalcedonian churches which pushed for the inclusion of the Creed. Because of their rejection of the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), they were erroneously dubbed "Monophysites" and "Eutychians" by the upholders of the Council.[161] While denying the charge of Monophysitism, these churches nevertheless maintained that Chalcedon had betrayed the Faith established at the first two ecumenical councils, hence their motive in establishing the recitation of the Creed by all at each Liturgy. Antioch was probably the first church to introduce the recitation of the Creed; and, as we saw above when we examined the history of the Cherubic Hymn, Pseudo-Dionysius at the turn of the sixth century spoke of reciting the Creed after the Great Entrance.

The particular circumstances which led to the inclusion are as follows: The Non-Chalcedonian Emperor Anastasius I came to the throne in 491, and eventually decided to exile Patriarch Macedonius II in order to install the Non-Chalcedonian Timothy I (511-518) to the Patriarchal seat of Constantinople. He promptly imposed the Non-Chalcedonian practice of reciting the Nicene Creed at the Liturgy, which continued even after the patriarchate returned to the Chalcedonian fold. Indeed, deleting the Creed would have looked like a repudiation of Nicaea -- which was precisely the charge leveled against the Orthodox upholders of the Council of Chalcedon. Emperor Justin II (567-578) later ordered that the addition to the Creed composed at the Second Ecumenical Council be recited as well.

In the Western churches, an interpolation has been added to the common Creed. The original Creed had simply paraphrased what Jesus said in John 15:26[162] concerning the eternal relation of the Holy Spirit to the other two Persons of the Trinity: "[I believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father." But in the West, some churches during the sixth century started adding, "who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*." Starting in Spain, the addition spread slowly until it was finally adopted in Rome itself during the eleventh

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[161] **On Eutyches and Monophysitism, see what was written above on the *Monogenes*.**

[162] "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth *who proceeds from the Father*, He will testify of Me."

century. The Western addition, called in Latin the *filioque*,[163] is rejected by the Orthodox as a theological error inserted into the Creed in an uncanonical manner.

THE ANAPHORA
(THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER)

The *Anaphora*, also known as the Eucharistic Prayer, is the heart of the Liturgy. The word "anaphora" is from the Greek verb *anapherein*, and is found frequently in the Bible where it has the sense of "offering a sacrifice."[164] It also is used in the sense of being "taken up," as when Jesus took Peter, James and John and "led them up (*anapherei autous*) a high mountain," where He was then transfigured before them.[165] Interestingly, it can also be used in the sense of "to impose a burden," as when the prophet says the Lord "shall bear their sins."[166] In the Anaphora, Christ leads us up the mountain where we behold His glory and offer up the eucharistic sacrifice for the burden of our sins.

After the Creed, the deacon cries out:

"Let us stand aright; let us stand in awe; let us attend, that we may present the holy offering in peace."

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[163]It is called this because the line in Latin reads: *"qui ex Patre Filioque procedit."*

[164]In the Septuagint, Genesis 8:20; Leviticus 14:20; 17:5; Isaiah 57:6. Also Hebrews 7:27; 13:15; and James 2:21.

[165]Matthew 17:1.

[166]Isaiah 53:11 (LXX).

Through the deacon's admonition, "Let us stand aright; let us stand in awe," we are asked to stand firm in the Creed and not to be thrown off balance by the persuasive arguments of heretics. Then he asks us to stand in awe of the Lord so that the perils of entertaining doubt or hesitation on matters of Faith may be realized by all.

Peace must be a part of every offering to the Lord. Therefore the deacon adds:

"Let us attend, that we may present the holy offering in peace."

Along with peace, we must also offer mercy, for the Lord says, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."[167] Mercy is the fruit of true peace. Therefore the people proclaim:

"A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise."

Mercy, peace and praise are three types of Old Testament sacrifices which are now fulfilled in Christ. When our soul rests in Christ, it is naturally filled with mercy, peace and joyful praise.

The deacon's admonition to stand was originally a mere rubric. In the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions*, the deacon's command reveals its practical nature: "Let the mothers take their children in hand. Let no one have anything against anyone; let no one remain here in hypocrisy. Let us stand up straight before the Lord with fear and trembling to offer [the holy oblation]."[168] This practical command became an admonition and a fixed part of the text, appearing as it now stands in the Liturgy around the eighth century. As such, a response to the deacon's admonition developed: "A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise." This response did not, however, immediately appear in its present form. There were originally many versions appearing around the eighth century: "Mercy, peace;" "Mercy and peace and the sacrifice of praise;" and so forth.

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[167]**Hosea 6:6; cf. Matthew 9:13.**

[168]***The Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 8, 12.**

After the people's response to the deacon, the priest wishes us the greatest of all blessings:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."[169]

This prayer procures for us the benefits of the Holy Trinity, the font of every perfect gift, asking from each of the Divine Persons His own special gift:

From the Father, we ask for *agape*, love. The apostle John wrote, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."[170] As it is written, "every good gift and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights."[171]

From the Son, we ask for *charis*, grace. The grace of the Son is the love of the Father actualized in the world, as John said above. To be filled with grace is to be filled with divine life, which is love itself. "For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."[172]

From the Spirit, we ask for *koinonia*, that is, communion and fellowship. We receive the love of the Father through the grace of the Son and in the communion of the Holy Spirit. It is thus, in the words of the apostle Peter,

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[169] 2 Corinthians 13:13.

[170] 1 John 4:10.

[171] James 1:17.

[172] John 3:16.

that we “participate (*koinonia*) in the divine nature.”[173] In the Holy Spirit we enter into relationship with the Father, rendering love complete in the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

The people return the priest’s blessing that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with them all, saying:

“And with your spirit.”

Then the priest begins to lead everyone to the heavenly Jerusalem on top of the heavenly Zion. Calling all to be heavenly-minded, he exclaims:

“Let us lift up our hearts!”

This is taken from the prophet Jeremiah, “Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.”[174] We then give our consent, saying that our hearts are where our treasure is, that is, with the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we declare:

“We lift them up to the Lord!”

Nothing remains but to give thanks to God, the Author of all good things. As we have already observed, the very word *eucharist* means “thanksgiving.” Consequently it is fitting, before the great prayer in which the holy offerings will be consecrated, that the celebrant leads us in an act of thanksgiving, saying:

“Let us give thanks to the Lord.”

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[173] **2 Peter 1:4.**

[174] **Lamentations 3:41.**

We affirm the appropriateness of giving thanks to the Holy Trinity:

“It is proper and right to worship Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the Trinity, one in essence and undivided.”

At the same time the priest prays silently to the Holy Trinity, who he addresses as “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing and eternally the same.” In this prayer, the priest is initiated into the very splendor of the Trinity:

The splendor of the Father, who is eternal and unbegotten;

The splendor of the Son and Word, who is begotten without beginning;

The splendor of the Holy Spirit, who is co-essential with the first two Persons of the Trinity, eternally proceeding from the Father.

The priest then thanks God for all blessings, either manifest or hidden, that have been granted to us. He also thanks God for the Liturgy which the Lord is pleased to accept from his hands. The priest is humbled that the Lord should accept such a simple offering, seeing that the heavenly throne is surrounded by thousands of angels rendering constant praise. The priest contemplates the glorification of the angelic powers and resolves to join in their unending hymn of praise; consequently, with the Cherubim and the Seraphim, he exclaims:

“Singing the victory hymn, proclaiming, crying out, and saying...”[175]
Then the people join the priest in singing:

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[175] **As the priest says these words, he (or the deacon) touches the edge of the Diskos with each of the points of the asterisk in succession. He then makes the sign of the cross over it, kisses it and lays it aside.**

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Your glory; hosanna in the highest: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

While we shout the triple acclamation of, “Holy, holy, holy,” it is nevertheless understood that there is only one lordship, one power, and one divinity. It will be remembered that the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord on an exalted throne in mists of incense with the angelic powers surrounding Him crying out, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.”[176] And “one of the seraphim flew to [the prophet], having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: `Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged.’”[177]

The details in this passage from Isaiah are interpreted allegorically as the priest at the Holy Table holding in his hands the spiritual coal, the eucharistic Christ, sanctifying and purifying those who partake. For Christ has penetrated the heavens,[178] and we have Him as an advocate before the Father, the one who forgives all our sins.[179]

The Faithful also shout, “Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” The Hebrew word *hosanna*, found only in Psalm 118:25 in the Old Testament, consists of the imperative *hosa*, “save,” followed by the participle *na*, meaning “we beseech.” Thus Psalm 118:25 is translated, “Save now, I pray, O Lord.” The word hosanna is therefore a cry for help from those in distress. In the Liturgy, hosanna is an admission of the wretched position our sins have placed us in; and at the same time it is an exclamation of trust that our God can save us if we beseech Him.

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[176]**Isaiah 6:1-4.**

[177]**Isaiah 6:6-7.**

[178]**Hebrews 4:14.**

[179]**1 John 2:1-2.**

The phrase, “Hosanna in the highest!”, might mean that we are calling upon all the angelic hosts “in the highest” realms of heaven to assist us in crying to the Lord, “Save us now!” Or “in the highest” may mean, “to the utmost,” so that we are imploring God to perfect His salvation in us. Blessed be Jesus Christ who is about to come to us in the Eucharist to save all who partake!

After shouting, “hosanna,” the next thing the people shout in the Divine Liturgy is, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” This is also taken from Psalm 118, verse 26. This psalm is the final one of what is called the “Egyptian Hallel,” a series of psalms used by the Israelites during the great feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Psalm 118 was sung as part of a great procession into the Temple in Jerusalem, as seen by verse 27: “Yahweh is God and He has given us light; bind the festival sacrifice with cords on to the altar’s horns.” The word translated “festival” means “festal procession,” so the verse can also be translated as, “Begin the festal procession with branches as far as the altar’s horns.”

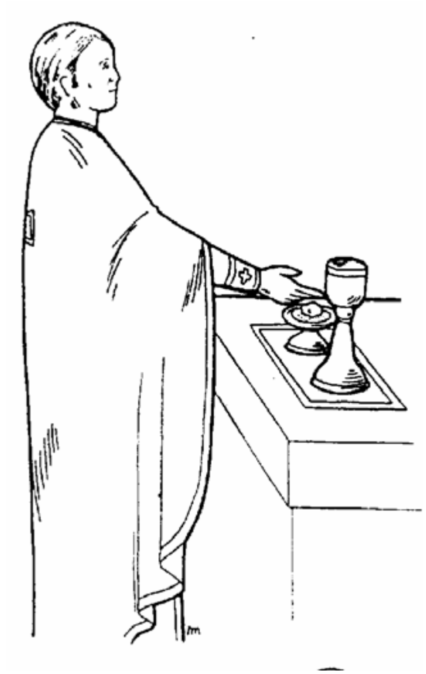
Thus Psalm 118 was originally part of a thanksgiving liturgy. The procession started outside the Temple gate by singing the first nineteen verses of the psalm; then, after exclaiming in verse 19, “Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them and I will praise the Lord,” everyone proceeded into the Temple and sang the rest of the psalm in the court. Upon entering the Temple, the people sang, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Then a thanksgiving offering was made. How appropriate, therefore, is the use of this psalm in the Divine Liturgy, when we celebrate the ultimate Passover after the procession of the Great Entrance. As we prepare to offer our *eucharistic* (thanksgiving) sacrifice, the Church welcomes everyone with this same psalm.

After singing the above verses from Psalm 118, the priest then says a silent prayer declaring each Person of the Trinity to be utterly holy. The prayer celebrates all that God in his unbounded love has done to save us. The priest cites John 3:16 to this effect:

“Holy are You and most holy, and magnificent is Your glory: Who has so loved Your world as to give Your Only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Then, recalling how Christ “fulfilled all the divine plan” to accomplish our redemption, the prayer tells us about that night when the Lord celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples: On the night of His betrayal, the night before He gave Himself up for the life of the world, Christ took bread in His all-holy, pure, and blameless hands, and then gave thanks and praise. He sanctified it, broke it, and gave it to His holy disciples, saying:

“Take, eat, this is my Body which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins.”



This is said aloud by the priest so that all may fully participate. It will be noted that the words which the priest utters is from 1 Corinthians 11:24 (“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you.”) with the addition, “for the forgiveness of sins.” The addition has always been a normal feature of Eastern liturgies. In the Liturgy of Saint James, the oldest liturgy still in use, the words are, “This is my Body, which is broken for you and for many, and is given for the forgiveness of sins and for life eternal.” The fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions* has: “This is the mystery of the New Testament, take of it and eat. This is my Body, which is broken for many, for the forgiveness of sins.”[180]

The reason for the addition may lie in the fact that, when Jesus took up the Chalice at the Last Supper, He said, “[T]his is My blood...which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”[181] Since His Body just as much as His Blood was given “for the forgiveness of sins,” it is appropriate to say so in order to avoid any confusion on the matter.

The priest then says:

“Likewise after supper He took the cup, saying...”

And bowing his head while pointing to the Chalice, he recites the words of the Lord recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

“Drink of this, all of you: this is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”[182]

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[180]***The Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 8, 12.**

[181]**Matthew 26:28.**

[182]**Matthew 26:27-28.**

The Orthodox do not think of the Eucharist as a mere memorial in the sense of a sentimental journey down Memory Lane. The Eucharist is the New Testament fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover, when the Israelites were saved from Egypt by eating the Passover lamb. After this spectacular saving act of the Lord, the Jews were expected to celebrate the Passover annually on the 14th of the month of Nisan: "This is the day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord -- a lasting ordinance."[183] The deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh was not to be viewed as an isolated instance of God saving one group of Israelites. The Passover was to forever be the heart of Jewish religious consciousness, and each new generation was to personally relive the divine intervention into human history, thus actually participating personally in the salvific act of God.

The New Testament makes clear that the Passover was but a shadow of the reality to come. The Eucharist is the reality which cast that shadow. In the Eucharist, we participate in God's saving act in the crucified Lamb, a salvation infinitely greater than that experienced by Israel in Egypt. Therefore the Apostle says, "For indeed Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast (i.e., the Eucharist)."[184]

Our Lord began His ministry "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene."[185] As none of us were there at the time, we plainly can't remember our Lord's sacrifice in the usual way we "remember" an event. Nor will it do to simply recall biblical texts about what He did for us. By commanding us to "remember" Him within the context of the Passover meal, Christ intends for us to remember Him by actually reliving His death and resurrection in the Eucharist. Holy Friday and Easter Sunday are

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[183] Exodus 12:14.

[184] 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.

[185] Luke 3:1.

not merely historical incidents which we only read about in the Gospels, they are what we are to personally experience at the sacramental "wedding supper of the Lamb."[186]

Thus the Eucharist is not only a liturgical "memory aid" of Christ's sacrifice; it is the actual entrance into the kingdom of God, the actual deifying Body and Blood of the Lord. This is as the Lord taught: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day....He who eats this bread will live forever."[187]

While we don't know the method by which the change takes place, we do know that the Eucharist is the glorified Body of the resurrected Savior, deifying those who consume it in faith. The resurrection made the gift of Christ's Body the gift of immortality. In the words of Saint Ignatius (110), the third bishop of Antioch after the apostle Peter, the Eucharist is "the medicine of immortality, the antidote that we should not die, but live forever in Jesus Christ."[188] By participating sacramentally in Christ's resurrected body, we too shall know the resurrection to eternal life on the Last Day.

THE ANAMNESIS

In order to participate in the entirety of what Christ has done on our behalf, and in order to fully carry out Christ's command, "Do this in memory of me," the priest recites a prayer called the *anamnesis*, the "commemoration." The

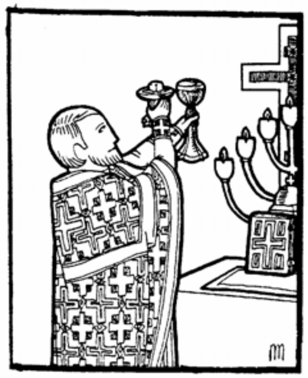
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[186]Revelation 19:9.

[187]John 6:53-58.

[188]Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 20:2.

celebrant remembers the Lord's crucifixion, entombment, resurrection on the third day, his enthronement at the right hand of the Father, and his "second and glorious coming." The fact that Christ's Second Coming is "remembered" highlights an interesting aspect of the Eastern Liturgy: there is no past, present or future. We have been elevated outside of time. In the Liturgy time and space are obliterated because, in the presence of Christ, we are in the presence of the Eternal and the Infinite.



The priest (or deacon) then takes the Diskos in his right hand and the Chalice in his left. With his right forearm over his left one, forming a cross, he elevates the gifts over the antimension and he makes the sign of the cross. He then lowers the gifts on to the antimension, offering to God gifts from God's own gifts to us. After praying quietly "for those things which have come to pass for us: the cross, the grave, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, the second and glorious coming," the priest concludes the sentence out loud:

"...offering to You these gifts from Your own gifts, in all and for all."[189]

The first part of the offering, "offering to You these gifts from Your own gifts," has its origins in Hebrew prayers. When King David, for example, was taking offerings for the building of the Temple, he blessed the Lord, saying, "For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You."[190] Among the early Christians, who were likely inspired by David's prayer, similar phrases are found on foundation stones of churches, shrines and memorials. When the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was built by Emperor Justinian (527-565), he had etched on the altar, "O Christ, Your servants Justinian and Theodora [the Empress] offer You Your gifts from Your own

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[189]The Greek idiomatic expression, "in all and for the sake of all," ought to be translated, "always and everywhere."

[190]1 Chronicles 29:14.

gifts." Justinian was probably echoing the Liturgy, which no doubt already contained the offering, "these gifts from Your own gifts."

Thus becoming eye-witnesses of the mysteries of God and partakers of eternal life, sharing in the divine nature, we glorify the Mystery of Christ's love for us:

"We praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You, and we pray to You, O Lord our God."

The priest then asks God to accomplish the Mystery His Son gave to His Church, that the bread and wine be changed into the Body and Blood of Christ our God. Known as the *epiclesis*, it is the prayer whereby the celebrant entreats God to send down the Holy Spirit upon the gifts and the people. The Holy Spirit, invisibly present by the good-will of the Father, changes the holy gifts which are set forth into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It was to give us this eucharistic Mystery that the Lord came into the world: "For their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified,"[191] and, "I am the bread of life...This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat it and not die....He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."[192]

The Orthodox don't believe the change of the gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ occurs at the words of Institution, "This is my body, etc." Jesus said a blessing over the bread at the Last Supper before breaking it,[193] leading Orthodox liturgists to the conclusion that the change occurred at Jesus' prayer rather than afterwards at the declaration, "This is my body,...This is my blood." It seems unthinkable that the bread would be first broken, a liturgical act known as the *fracture*, and *then* changed into the Body of Christ. The normal order is to effect the change and then to break the Body, symbolizing the sacrifice: "Take, eat; this is my body which is *broken* for you."[194]

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[191]John 17:19.

[192]John 6:48-56.

[193]Cf. Matthew 26:26.

[194]1 Corinthians 11:24.

The idea of a consecratory "formula" (i.e., like, "This is my body, etc.") was a preoccupation of the Scholastic theology which developed in the West at the height of the Middle Ages. At this time in Western Church history there was a need to stress the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament against those who were challenging it. In reaction to this, there arose the desire to pinpoint the exact moment in which the change occurred. Thus it was decided that before Christ's words of Institution are spoken by the priest, the gifts are merely bread and wine; afterwards, the gifts become the very Body and Blood of Christ.

The Aristotelian categories of "substance" and "accidents" were employed in the West to describe the phenomenon and the whole process was dubbed "transubstantiation." One of the unfortunate results of this approach has been to render the other elements of the Liturgy nearly meaningless. While any particular liturgical detail may have a certain functional, illustrative or pedagogic value, they aren't seen as necessary for the "efficacy" of the Eucharist. Consequently, Western liturgists have felt free to run rampant in reforming their Latin Mass, adding, deleting and re-arranging elements at a whim in order to make it "relevant" to the contemporary world.

While some Scholastic terminology, like the word transubstantiation itself, has in the past crept into some Orthodox theological text-books under Western influence, this whole approach to the Mystery of the Eucharist is quite alien to Orthodoxy. It should be stressed here that Orthodoxy doesn't hold that the epiclesis is a consecratory formula like Roman Catholics believe the words of Institution are a consecratory formula. Perhaps the best way to describe the Orthodox understanding of the role of the epiclesis is to say that the epiclesis is the "climax" of the Anaphora. While the epiclesis is important, it does not detract from the importance of the rest of the Liturgy.

The presence of such an invocation of the Holy Spirit in the ancient Christian Liturgy is a controversial one among liturgists. Toward the end of the second century, Hippolytus of Rome gives the text of the epiclesis as known in his day: "And we pray You that You would send Your Holy Spirit *upon the oblation* of Your holy Church; [and that] You would grant to all [Your saints] who partake to be united [to You], that they may be fulfilled with the Holy

Spirit for the confirmation of [their] faith in truth."[195] Here the Holy Spirit is asked to come upon the oblation and upon all gathered to celebrate.

We find the epiclesis is fully developed by the time of Cyril of Jerusalem. Writing in the fourth century, in the midst of the controversy over the nature of the Holy Spirit which was then rocking the Church, Cyril is very explicit about the role of the Holy Spirit in the epiclesis: "Then having sanctified ourselves by these spiritual hymns ["Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth"], we call upon the merciful God to send forth His Holy Spirit upon the gifts lying before Him; that He may make the Bread the Body of Christ, and the Wine the Blood of Christ; for whatsoever the Holy Spirit has touched, is sanctified and changed."[196]

We have seen that the transformation of the bread and wine is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, the same power from on high that transformed a group of simple fishermen into Apostles. The Holy Spirit which descended in tongues of fire at Pentecost has never forsaken the Church. The Spirit created the Church, is presently with the Church, and will remain with the Church until the end.

Moreover, the Lord Himself promised to be with us, even to the end of the world.[197] This "presence" of the Lord Jesus is achieved in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit effects the great and holy Mystery, making the Son present under the appearance of bread and wine. And as the Mystery is accomplished by the will of the Father, the sacramental presence is truly Trinitarian.

The priest blesses the holy bread, saying the following epiclesis:

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[195] **Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 3:4. Emphasis added.**

[196] **Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses*, 5:7.**

[197] **Matthew 28:20.**

"And make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ..."

Then he blesses the holy Chalice:

"...and that which is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ..."

And making the sign of the cross over the gifts, he says:

"...changing them by Your Holy Spirit; amen, amen, amen."

In a low voice, the priest prays for those who will partake of the Mysteries. He prays that our Communion in the Eucharist may bring a cleansing of our souls, forgiveness of sins, the communion of the Holy Spirit, fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven, and boldness before God. Remembering Paul's warning that those who partake unworthily are guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord,[198] the priest asks that our Communion may not be for judgment or condemnation.[199]

Then the priest remembers both the living and those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. The Holy Spirit calls all to the unity of Christ, and will continue to call us to unity until the Second Coming of the Lord to judge the living and the dead. In the priest's prayer, the souls of departed Christians are called to assemble with the prophets, apostles, and priests, who are even now reclining with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the mystical banquet in Christ's kingdom.

When talking about prayers for the departed, it is important to bear in mind that there is only one Church, one bride of the heavenly Bridegroom Who is Jesus Christ our Lord. And as our Lord is a strict monogamist, there will

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[198] 1 Corinthians 11:27.

[199] 1 Corinthians 11:34.

never be more than one Church. Thus there aren't two Churches, one on earth and another in heaven, completely separated by the yawning chasm of death.

To switch metaphors, the Body of Christ "is one though it has many parts,"[200] and Christians don't become amputated from the Body simply because they die. Christ has trampled down death, and so the saints on earth are in communion with the heavenly, glorified saints, thus forming one Church. The Church is one by being "in Christ" and so all of us who are "in Christ" are able to pray for each other. Thus there is a union of all who share in the life of Christ, whether on earth or in the kingdom of heaven.

The priest finishes his prayer by commemorating out loud the Mother of God and the whole assembly of the saints. The saints prompt the Church to give thanks to God because their glorification is the assurance of our own eventual glorification. As the saints have already received the fullness of what we ask for in the Liturgy, the priest asks that he may be assisted by their prayers.

The commemoration of the Theotokos is spoken aloud by the priest:

"Especially our most holy, pure, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary."

To which the people respond with a well-loved hymn called the *Megalynarion*:

"It is truly right to call you blessed, O Theotokos, ever blessed and most pure, and the mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without corruption you gave birth to God the Word. Truly the Theotokos, we magnify you."

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[200] **1 Corinthians 12:12.**

The origin of the *Megalynarion* is unknown. Legend has it that it originated on Mount Athos in Greece during the tenth century when the archangel Gabriel appeared before an icon of the Theotokos known as, “The Loving Icon.” He then sang the hymn we know today as the *Megalynarion*, and the name of the icon was promptly changed to, “It Is Truly Right Icon.” However, the evidence suggests that the *Megalynarion* appeared even earlier, likely during the sixth century.

No doubt some would look upon this hymn as heaping far too much glory upon the Virgin Mary. But the hymn itself contains its own justification: we honor Mary because she bore God the Word and is in consequence “truly Theotokos,” the “God-bearer.” In other words, we are merely imitating God by honoring Mary, for God paid Mary the highest honor He could pay to any created being, human or angelic. She was privileged to literally bear the Second Person of the Trinity in her own body and, when Christ was born, to care for Him as a child. Could we in a mere hymn pay Mary any higher honor than that which God has already paid her?

Next, the priest asks for the salvation of “all humanity.” The list of those commemorated can be divided into three groups. First, the priest makes supplication for the Church hierarchy. Second, he prays for the holy, catholic, and apostolic Church everywhere, and for all those in public service that they may serve and govern in peace. This is in accordance with the Apostle’s instructions that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, *for kings and all in authority*.”[201] Finally, the priest prays for the local church and for the community in which it is located, for the sick, the suffering, the captive, and for those traveling. The prayer is of a supplicatory nature, but it is also an act of thanksgiving, for it implies that God is our supreme Benefactor.

At this point in the Liturgy, the gifts have been received at the heavenly altar of God as an offering and a spiritual fragrance; they in return bear divine grace, the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gifts are now called “sanctified” since they can now impart this sanctification to us. To receive this sanctification, we must not approach the gifts as “individuals,” but corporately as the Church. We are the Body of Christ partaking of the Body of Christ. It will be

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[201] **1 Timothy 2:2.**

recalled that immediately after instituting the Eucharist, the Lord Himself prayed for those of His Church, “that they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me”[202]

Having this need for Christian unity in mind, the priest prays aloud:

“And grant that with *one* mouth and *one* heart we may glorify[203] and praise Your most honorable and majestic name: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages.”

With the end of the Commemorations also ends the Anaphora. The Anaphora has preserved its form, with only insignificant changes, since the fourth century. This can readily be seen from reading such ancient liturgies as the one found in the *Apostolic Constitutions.*

After the Anaphora follows what is called the Litany of Supplication as a preparation for holy Communion. It is composed of twelve petitions, the first being not so much a “petition” as an exhortation to earnest prayer. After the twelve petitions, the priests adds one last request:

“And make us worthy, Master, that with boldness and without condemnation, to dare call You, the heavenly God, Father, and to say...”

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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[202]John 17:21.

[203]Cf. Romans 15:6.

As a look at any biblical concordance reveals, the God of Israel was rarely called "Father" in the Old Testament. In the two places where He was, it was in later books written outside of Palestine.[204] If fatherhood was associated with God, it was usually by way of analogy and not as a direct address.[205] Most of the rare rabbinical references to God as Father come after the time of Christ; and while God is called Father in the Jewish prayers after meals, the preponderance of the evidence suggests that God wasn't addressed as Father before the coming of Jesus.

The proper name for God, revealed to Moses in the burning bush, was, "I AM WHO I AM," or YHWH (pronounced "Yahweh") in Hebrew.[206] Yahweh was the all-mighty Creator of the Universe, the One who granted victory on the battlefield, delivering His people from enemies. Yahweh was to be held in awe, His throne being on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

The name of God was fearful to pronounce. The High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year at Yom Kippur, the solemn Day of Atonement, and after fasting and doing penance, would pronounce God's name in a whisper. Only the priests officiating at this feast were initiated into the proper pronunciation of God's holy and mystical name. The name was considered too holy to be pronounced by the average person; so sacred, in fact, that it wasn't even permissible to write it: people had to write instead *adonay*, "my Lord." In short, the practice of Jewish prayer before the advent of the Savior was to heap up a multitude of formal titles ascribing to God complete sovereignty and lordship in contrast to human impotence and smallness.

How scandalized everyone must have been at Jesus' familiarity with God, whom he called, "my Father!" In Aramaic, the language which Jesus spoke, the word is *abba*. This is the word used when a small child lovingly addresses his father, like "daddy" in English. After Jesus instituted the Eucharist, while in the garden of

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[204] **Tobit 13:4 and Ecclesiasticus 51:10. There are also references to God as father in some apocryphal works like the Wisdom of Solomon, but these may be later Christian interpolations.**

[205] **E.g., Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 103:13; Isaiah 63:16; Malachi 2:10.**

[206] **Exodus 3:14-15.**

Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You.”[207] Interestingly, according to an ancient rabbinical tradition, one of the things Jesus was accused of was misappropriating the sacred pronunciation of the name of Yahweh from the High Priest and using it to perform miracles.[208]

As followers of Christ, we have been given this same privilege of addressing God as “Abba.” Paul writes, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, `Abba, Father!’”[209] What an awesome thing to contemplate! Therefore, during the Divine Liturgy, we can “dare” to pray *Abinu sh’baShammayim*, which in Hebrew is, “Our Father in heaven”:

“OUR FATHER in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily[210] bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

When the prayer is finished, the priest recites a doxology:

“For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages.”

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[207]Mark 14:36.

[208]Victor Buksbazen, *The Gospel in the Feasts of Israel* (Bellmawr, NJ:The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1954), 38.

[209]Galatians 4:6. Cf. Romans 8:15.

[210]The early Church usually understood the “daily bread” as the living, eucharistic bread which the Father gives us in the Liturgy. The Greek word for “daily,” *epiousios*, is nearly impossible to translate accurately because it occurs nowhere in Greek literature except in Matthew 6:11 and Luke 11:3. Biblical commentators and lexicographers generally translate the word in the sense of “day by day,” or “necessary (for sustenance),” or, “for the coming Day,” in the sense of the coming Day of the Lord, when “you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom” (Luke 22:30). Because of the obscurity of the word, Origen in the third century went as far as saying that the evangelists coined it especially for the Lord’s prayer. He may not have been too far from the truth!

It is uncertain exactly when the Lord’s Prayer was first included into the Liturgy. Since the Lord commanded us to pray it, the odds are that it has always been a part of Christian worship. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century tells us in the fifth lecture of his *Mystagogical Catecheses* that the Lord’s Prayer followed the Commemoration; in other words, it was were it stands today.

The priest then wishes peace to all. Turning toward the icon of Christ on the Iconostasis, he (or the deacon) says:

“Let us bow our heads to the Lord.”

After calling God our Father, we now call Christ our Lord. Acknowledging Jesus of Nazareth as our Master, we bow our heads to His icon, indicating our dependence on Him. As we bow, we say:

“To You, O Lord.”

The response suggests that we bow to Christ -- but to no other. While we bow our heads, the celebrant asks God to look down upon those who have bowed before Christ, for they have bowed their heads not to flesh and blood, but to the only God. Then he implores God to travel with those who journey by land, sea, and air, as well as to heal the sick.

Then follows a doxology which the priest prays aloud. Once more the priest addresses the Father, calling to mind the grace and compassion of the Only-begotten Son, and the goodness and holiness of the life-giving Spirit. The doxology, addressed specifically to the Father “through...Your Only-begotten Son,” ensures that our prayers will be granted. As the Savior promised, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name He will give you.”[211]

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[211] **John 16:23.**

THE ELEVATION

After this the priest prays in a low voice, invoking Christ to sanctify us from the throne of His glory, granting us His Body and Blood. After asking God to be gracious to him, a sinner, the priest elevates the sanctified gifts above the Diskos, saying:

"Let us attend! Holy Gifts for the holy people."

This invitation by the priest seems to derive from a very ancient tradition. As early as the second century we find something similar in a Syrian church manual known as the *Didache* (literally, "the Teaching"): "Hosannah to the God of David. If any one be holy, let him come! If any one be not, let him repent: *Maranatha* (Aramaic: "Come, O Lord!"), Amen."[212] This seems to echo the Book of Revelation (a book with a lot of liturgical imagery), which ends, "And the Spirit and the bride (i.e., the Church) say `Come!' And let him who hears say, `Come!' And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely...He who testifies to these things says, `Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!"[213]

The "holy people" are not only those who have attained perfection, but those also who are truly repentant and who desire to be sanctified by the holy Mysteries. The whole Church is called holy, not because it is perfect, but because of the holy gifts Christ has given her and which she dispenses to the people. When we partake of the holy Mysteries, we receive sanctification, not in name only, but in reality. For no one has holiness of himself; it is not

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[212]*Didache*, 10:6.

[213]Revelation 22:17, 20.

the consequence of human virtue, but comes to us exclusively from the Father, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the mid-fourth century, makes the following commentary upon this part of the Liturgy: “After this the priest says `Holy things to holy men.’ Holy are the gifts presented, since they have been visited by the Holy Spirit; holy are you also, having been vouchsafed the Holy Spirit; the holy things therefore correspond to the holy persons. Then you say, `One is holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ.’ For truly One is holy, by nature holy; we, too, are holy, but not by nature, only by participation, and discipline, and prayer.”[214]

So, when the priest says, “Holy Gifts are for the holy people,” the Faithful reply, as we learned from Cyril of Jerusalem:

“One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen”

The acclamation was inspired by what the Apostle wrote to the Philippians:

“Therefore God also has highly exalted [Jesus] and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.”[215]

HOLY COMMUNION

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[214]**Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses*, 5:19.**

[215]**Philippians 2:9-11.**

The congregation now chants the Communion Hymn (the *Koinonicon*), which for Sundays is Psalm 148:1:

"Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise Him in the highest. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."

While we sing this hymn, the priest breaks the sacred Bread, saying in a low voice:

"The Lamb of God is broken and distributed; broken but not divided; ever eaten yet never consumed, but sanctifying those who partake of Him."

The breaking of the Eucharist is called the "fracture," as has already been mentioned. While it has a practical end in enabling everyone to have a portion, it is also rich in symbolism. The dominant symbolism is of course Christ's sacrificial death. When the priest says, "broken but not divided," he means that we don't receive a "piece" of Christ when we consume a "piece" of the Eucharist. Christ is fully present in even the smallest particle or drop of the consecrated gifts. Similarly, when the priest says, "ever eaten yet never consumed," he means that Christ's body can never be entirely eaten, no matter how many liturgies are celebrated around the world on any Sunday. Like the miracle of the multiplying loaves,[216] there are always "leftovers" regardless of how much is consumed. The Church will never run out of the grace of the eucharistic Mystery.

The priest now arranges the pieces of the Lamb on the rim of the Diskos in the form of a cross,

IC (placed in the Chalice)
NI KA (for the people)
XC (for the clergy)

[216] **John 6:1-14.**

Placing a portion of the sacred Bread in the Chalice, the priest says:



“The fullness of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

He then blesses the warm water, called *zeon*, saying:

“Blessed is
the fervor of Your
saints.”

Pouring the water into the Chalice in the manner of a cross, he says:



“The fervor of faith, full of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

He drops into the Chalice a little warm water to symbolize the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. The zeon (“boiling” in Greek), is not mere water: it has been sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit. This point in the Liturgy represents a sort of re-enactment of Pentecost. Two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit descended after Christ had accomplished all the Father had sent him to do. The descent of the Spirit at Pentecost turned a frightened and motley crew of uneducated fishermen into the Body of Christ, the Church. Even so, during the Liturgy, the Spirit has come down upon mere bread and wine and has turned them into the Body and Blood of Christ, the Eucharist. The hot water is added to signify this reality.

The Communion prayers are then recited. Like the apostle Peter, we confess that Christ is the living God,[217] declaring the gifts to be truly His Body and Blood. The priest prays that God will have mercy on him, will forgive his sins, and make him worthy to partake of the Mysteries to eternal life. Imploring the Son of God to receive him as a partaker of His mystical Supper, the priest also promises not to reveal God's Mysteries to the enemies of Christ, nor to give the Lord a kiss as did Judas. Thus, like the thief on the cross, he petitions Christ, saying, "Remember me, Lord, in Your kingdom."[218]

The priest first gives the Eucharist to himself, and afterwards to the deacon. Following the ancient order of the Church, the priest receives the Body and Blood separately. After he has received three sips from the Chalice, the priest says:

"This has touched my lips, taking away my transgressions, and cleansing my sins."

This is obviously another allusion to the heavenly vision of the prophet Isaiah. After giving the burning coal to the prophet, the angel tells Isaiah, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."[219] The Eucharist is that fiery coal from heaven, burning away the filth and corruption of sin. The priest then transfers the remaining portions of the consecrated Bread into the holy Chalice, glorifying the resurrection of Christ.

Summoning the Faithful to Communion, the priest (or deacon) proceeds to the Royal Doors, raises the holy Chalice, and calls to those who wish to receive, saying:

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[217] **Matthew 16:16.**

[218] **Luke 23:4.**

[219] **Isaiah 6:7.**

"With fear of God, with faith and love, draw near."

The priest is asking us to look beyond the humble appearance of the Mystery by acknowledging God's presence within it. The only way to approach God is in fear, that is, in reverential awe. The priest also directs us to approach without doubts, though the reality before us transcends even reason itself. Finally, we are to recognize the Mystery as the expression of divine love, the source of eternal life for those who receive it, and we are to approach the eucharistic Gift ready to reciprocate that love in our own humble way.

The origin of this command can be gleaned from the fourth century *Apostolic Constitutions*. The rubric for Communion states that the clergy were to take Communion first, then deaconesses and widows, then, "finally all the people in order, with reverence and godly fear, without noise."[220] This instruction later became an actual pronouncement to maintain order as the crowds came forward for Communion.

The people express their faith by blessing Jesus and proclaiming His divinity, hidden under the sacramental veils:

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The Lord is God and He is revealed to us."

The *Apostolic Constitutions* explains that, in the early Church, the people sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will among men. Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord, being the Lord God who appeared to us. Hosanna in the highest."[221] Then, while the people took Communion, Psalm 33 was chanted.

Those who are prepared now come forth with reverence to receive the Eucharist while the choir sings the Communion hymn. The priest's prayer for the Faithful who approach to receive Communion asks for the

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[220]***The Apostolic Constitutions,* Book 8, 13.**

[221]**Ibid.**

forgiveness of their sins and eternal life. The long Communion spoon characteristic of Orthodoxy was introduced in the eighth century, which innovation was later heavily criticized by Western writers.

With the increase of more frequent Communion, there is now oftentimes a rather lengthy line in order to receive the awe-inspiring Mystery of Christ. This is the perfect opportunity to better prepare ourselves by slowly reciting a Communion prayer. The following simple prayer by Saint John of Damascus is a jewel from the Orthodox treasure-chest of spirituality:

"O Lord and Master, Jesus Christ our God, who alone has power to forgive our sins, do, O Good One, the lover of humanity, forgive all the sins that I have committed in knowledge or in ignorance, and make me worthy to receive without condemnation Your divine, glorious, immaculate and life-giving Mysteries -- not for punishment or for the increase of sin, but for purification and sanctification, and a promise of Your Kingdom and the Life to come; as a protection and a help to overthrow the adversaries, and to blot out my many sins. For You are a God of mercy and compassion and love toward humanity, and to You we give glory together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen."

POST-COMMUNION AND THANKSGIVING

After Communion has been given, the priest blesses the people, and prays for those who have just received, asking God to grant them salvation and blessing:

"Save, O God, Your people, and bless Your inheritance."

This blessing from Psalm 28:9 stresses the fact that we have been given the title of heir. As Christians, we stand to inherit all from the Creator of all. Paul tells us that, since God is our Father, "Therefore you are no longer a slave

but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."[222] James, the brother of the Lord, says, "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"[223]

Inheritance is based upon a familial relationship, usually between a parent and a child. The family relationship is a far closer relationship than the one between a Creator and His creature. The Fathers of the early Church had a favorite maxim to describe this mystery: The Son of God became the Son of Man that the sons of men might become the sons of God. The Father, by adopting us through Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten of the Father, has thus entered into a profoundly intimate relationship with us.

The priest then brings the Chalice to the Royal Doors and makes the sign of the cross with it, blessing the people. He then takes the consecrated gifts to the Prothesis while the people sing the troparion of the solemn Vespers of Pentecost:

"We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true Faith, worshiping the undivided Trinity, who has saved us."

Returning to the Holy Table, the priest transfers the consecrated portions representing the Mother of God and the saints into the holy Chalice. Then he does the same for those of the living and the dead, saying:

"Wash away, Lord, by Your holy Blood, the sins of all those here commemorated, through the intercessions of the Theotokos and all Your saints. Amen."

As he proclaims that God is exalted above the heavens, the priest lifts the holy Chalice and says:

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[222]Galatians 4:7.

[223]James 2:5.

“Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages.”

The congregation then intones a hymn taken from the writings of the Psalmist:

“Let our mouths be filled with Your praise, O Lord, that we may sing of Your glory. You have made us worthy to partake of Your holy Mysteries. Keep us in Your holiness, that all the day long we may meditate on Your righteousness. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.”

This hymn was inspired by Psalm 71:8, “Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day.” It was introduced into the Liturgy by Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople in 624, though in precisely what form is not exactly certain. The hymn in its present form was in the Liturgy celebrated in Constantinople by the ninth century. An eighth century Armenian version of the Liturgy of John Chrysostom has a different rendition of the hymn:

“We have been filled with Your good things, O Lord, tasting Your Body and Blood. Glory on high to You, who has fed us. You who continually feeds us, send down upon us Your spiritual blessing. Glory be on high to You who has fed us.”[224]

Even though we are not worthy to offer God a hymn of praise for the benefits we have received, we beseech God to grant us this privilege as well, filling our mouths with adoration. God gives the grace of prayer to those who ask for it, so now we entreat the Lord to give our lips the power to render proper praise. Then we ask that the sanctification which we have received in the Eucharist may remain with us to help us continue to meditate on God and His righteousness. Righteousness here encompasses the wisdom of God and His love, which we have witnessed in the holy Mystery of the Eucharist.

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[224] **Cf. Kucharek, *The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 720.**

The offerings have been consecrated, sanctified, and consumed. The priest and the Faithful now end the Liturgy with thanksgiving and praise to God. There is a short litany which exhorts us, who have been made worthy of the Mysteries just received, to render thanks to the Lord. We ask that God keep us in His grace and that our day may be holy, peaceful and sinless, and then we commend each other and our whole lives to Christ our God. The priest, meanwhile, has been saying a silent prayer asking God to make straight our paths, to keep us steadfast in God's fear, to guard our lives and to make safe our steps. Then the priest says aloud the following doxology which finishes the thanksgiving of the people:

"For You are our sanctification, and to You we give glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages."

THE DISMISSAL

After the people respond to the above doxology with an "Amen," the priest says:

"Let us go forth in peace."

To which we reply:

"In the name of the Lord!"

Prompting the priest to say:

"Let us pray to the Lord."

And we answer:

“Lord, have mercy.”

The priest then dismisses the congregation in peace, asking God to bless us and sanctify us and to protect the whole body of the Church. Those who bless the Lord and place their trust in Him shall be sanctified and glorified by the divine Power. The kingdom of God being within us, we should depart seeking to live the Liturgy in our daily lives. The priest also implores that peace be given to the world, to all the churches, to the clergy, to those in public service, and to all people everywhere. Since every good and perfect gift is from above from the Father of lights,[225] gratitude, thanksgiving, and worship should be given to the Lord. Thus, as though their petitions had already been granted, the people sing three times:

“Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore.”

Going forth into the world, we are always to bless the name of the Lord. The invocation of the name of Jesus Christ transforms our relationship with the outside world, revealing all things as icons and mysteries of God’s presence.

After entering the sanctuary through the Royal Doors, the priest says the following prayer over what is left of the prosphora at the Prothesis:

“Christ our God, you are the fulfillment of the law[226] and the prophets; you have fulfilled all the divine plan of the Father: fill our hearts with joy and gladness always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.”

Then the priest (or deacon) returns to the Royal Doors and says one last time:

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[225]James 1:17.

[226]Romans 13:10.

"Let us pray to the Lord."

The call to prayer is a call to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us; for, through Christ, we all have access to the Father by the Holy Spirit.[227] Therefore, to live a life of prayer is to live a life in the Spirit. Paul tells us that, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control....If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."[228]

The people answer the priest's call to prayer by responding one last time:

"Lord, have mercy."

As we prepare to depart, the priest invokes the blessing of the Lord upon us, that we may know His mercy through His divine grace and love. At the very end, the mercy of God is implored through the intercessions of the holy Theotokos and all the saints. Through the prayers of the holy Fathers, especially through those of Saint John Chrysostom, the priest asks that God will have mercy on us and save us.

Then standing on the lowest step in front of the Royal Doors, the priest offers the cross for the people to come forward and venerate while giving the following blessing:

"The blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon you always, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen."

As people exit the church, they usually take a piece of blessed bread called the *antidoron*. The Faithful also take a piece of antidoron after receiving Communion in order to swallow the last sacred bits of the Eucharist.

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[227]**Ephesians 2:18.**

[228]**Galatians 5:22-25.**

Originally the antidoron was only given to those who did not receive Communion; it was basically a kind of substitute. This explains why it is called “antidoron,” meaning literally “in place of the gift.” As the Church was growing in the earlier centuries, the number of those who took Communion decreased and those who started taking the antidoron increased.

The origin of the antidoron appears to go back to the original agape feasts of the primitive Church. As mentioned at the beginning of the book, these were common meals shared by everybody and which were originally celebrated in connection with the Eucharist. Hippolytus of Rome at the end of the second century writes of the distribution of blessed bread at the agape: “And they shall take from the hand of the bishop one piece of a loaf before each takes his own bread, for this is `blessed [bread];' but it is not the Eucharist as is the Body of the Lord.”[229]

Hippolytus also points out that only a “cleric” (*klairikos*) is able to bless the bread: “And if the Faithful should be present at a supper without the bishop, but with a presbyter or deacon present, let them similarly partake in orderly fashion. But let everyone be careful to receive the blessed bread from the hand of the presbyter or deacon. Similarly, a catechumen shall receive the same bread, [but] exorcized. If laymen (*laos*) only are met together without the clergy, let them act with discipline. For the layman cannot make a blessing.”[230]

Sometimes before the end of the Divine Liturgy, prayers of thanksgiving are said by the whole congregation before the departure. As the Eucharist is essentially a corporate act of thanksgiving, nothing could be more appropriate. Regardless of the practice of any particular parish, however, it is incumbent upon each of us to offer prayers of thanksgiving after holy Communion. The following prayer by Saint Basil the Great, the great fourth century Cappadocian Father, is a short yet poetic act of thanksgiving:

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[229]**Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 26:2.**

[230]**Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 26:11-12.**

“O Master, Christ our God, King of the ages and Maker of all things: I thank You for all the good things which You have bestowed upon me and for this partaking of Your immaculate and life-giving Mysteries. Therefore I pray to You, O good One and lover of humanity: Keep me under Your protection and in the shadow of Your wings; and grant to me that with a pure conscience and to my last breath I may partake of Your holy Mysteries, for the forgiveness of sins and for everlasting life. For You are the Bread of Life, the Fountain of holiness, the Giver of good things; and to You we give glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.”

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Metropolitan PHILIP
Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America